

A HISTORY  
OF  
ENGLISH PROSODY

FROM THE TWELFTH CENTURY TO  
THE PRESENT DAY

BY

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VOL. II

*FROM SHAKESPEARE TO CRABBE*

'Maxima and minima'—*Mathematical Tracts*

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## PREFACE

NOT many prefatory words are, I think, necessary to this volume. I have indeed to acknowledge, with the most sincere thanks, the gratifying and almost unhopèd-for approval given by some competent and impartial critics to the first. Unfavourable comment seems to have very mainly reduced itself either to a reiteration of the views which prefer German theory to English fact, or to an amplification of the argument, "I know and care very little about this subject; therefore nobody has any business to write a book, and especially a big book, on it." This latter syllogism is perhaps a little inconclusive; at any rate, I do not propose to rebut it. Nor would it be of much use to cope directly with those whose prejudices against classical nomenclature and quantitative valuation lead them to deny the possibility of "scanning" Shakespeare and Milton. It is better to disprove the impossibility by the simple expedient of going and doing it. As for the objection, which has actually been made, that this book will not make poets: I can only say, "God forbid that it should attempt to do so!"

One point, however, is of too much importance to be wholly omitted. A reviewer in *The Guardian* (of whom I have no complaint to make on the whole, and who seemed, indeed, to be not so much dissatisfied with my prosodic conclusions as shocked at my Chaucerian heresies) commented on the note at vol. i. p. 299—respecting the more than probable *unconsciousness* of early

poets as to their prosodic system—as if it were a “hedge,” a kind of afterthought on discovering inconveniences. I can assure him that it was nothing of the kind: but, like other similar separated notes, intended to draw special attention to an important point. In fact, this thing happens to be the hinge and staple of my own critical and prosodic apparatus. Those who cannot see the existence and the value of this silent testimony are in much the same plight with the assailants of formal logic, a hundred years ago and later, who asked if the great arguers from Demosthenes and Plato to Burke and Bentham reasoned in syllogism? The retort, of course, was, that though every good argument is not syllogistically expressed, or by consciousness syllogistically thought out, every good argument is reducible to syllogism; and the same, *mutatis mutandis*, is the reply here.

There is nothing over which I have taken more pains than the method of this volume; and I may respectfully beg readers not to judge it hastily as unmethodical. In some experience of writing, and a very great experience of reading, literary histories, I have found that while there are the usual three courses of apparent and self-justifying system in planning these, they are all, if too rigidly adhered to, productive of great inconveniences. The system of proceeding wholly by Kinds, which has become fashionable recently, looks very “good and godly”—very philosophical and scientific; but it leads, in some instances at any rate, to the entire destruction of all historical perspective and mapping out, so that contemporary work is separated by hundreds of pages. The opposite plan of adopting strict chronological slices, of leaving an author in the middle of his career without ruth, and picking him up again without ceremony, obviates this difficulty, but substitutes another. You get no complete view of any writer; you have to patch and piece him together from

two or three or more different chapters or even volumes ; and you must be provided with a very clear head, a very good memory, and a copious supply of temper, if you do not get either irretrievably muddled, or driven out of all patience, or both. If, on the other or third hand, you proceed by authors *merely*, the thing becomes rather a dictionary than a history ; and there is the danger—perhaps the most insidious of all because it is somewhat latent—of obscuring the coincidence of persons, times, kinds, and works. I have endeavoured to meet all these difficulties by adopting no one of the three ways exclusively, and proceeding by each as seems to me most likely to give the general sequence of things. No doubt this too is difficult—I daresay I have failed to do it perfectly ; but I am sure it was worth attempting.

Perhaps I should give instances. I have dealt together with the whole prosody of Donne and of Waller, though in each case part of it falls out of the main subject of the chapter in which the treatment appears, because there is an important connection, and one which concerns that main subject, between the parts. I have separated the treatment of Cowley, because his Pindarics require, as it seems to me, distinct handling. I have given combined and exclusive treatment to the whole work, multifarious as it is, of Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden, because each of these has prosodic importance and prosodic idiosyncrasy which seem to me to demand this treatment.

But enough of this shadow-fighting : let us speak once more of the real Eugénie Grandet—of Prosody herself.<sup>1</sup>

GEORGE SAINTSBURY.

BATH, Maundy Thursday, 1908.

<sup>1</sup> The great bulk of matter which has to be dealt with in this volume has made it necessary to suspend the Appendix system as far as it is concerned. I regret this, because it prevents my giving certain excursus which I have

already prepared to meet direct requests, such as one on the question "What is a foot?" and another on the point whether the iamb or the trochee is really the staple foot of English poetry. But these and some others will come with greater appropriateness at the end of the whole inquiry on which they are based; and there is no absolute necessity for an interim survey of rhyme, etc., at the point here reached. As before, I have to give the heartiest thanks to Professors Ker, Elton, and Gregory Smith, for reading my proofs, and for making many valuable suggestions.

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## ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA FOR VOL. I.

*Page xvii.*—In strictness I should have included in the list of feet the *Proceleusmatic*, or double pyrrhic, ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪. I do not, however, believe that this is possible in English verse, even as a combination; and in prose, I should feel inclined, if it occurred anywhere, to merge it in a dochmiac.

*Page 179, note.*—I was very sorry to learn that this note was misunderstood by some readers as meaning that Professor Skeat had *not* printed the three texts of Langland apart from each other, and that Whitaker's was the only one in which C could be read alone. Even now I hardly know how to remedy the matter, for the note seems to me quite clear. It means—

That in Dr. Skeat's Clarendon Press edition the three texts appear on the same page or page-opening;

That in his E.E.T.S. edition they all appear, but are separately printed;

That Whitaker's contains C *without* A or B in any form or place; Wright's is of course, B, with a certain proportion of A and C variants.

*Page 245.*—I might, and perhaps should, have added here or at p. 264, the alchemical poets Norton and Ripley, Bradshaw's *Life of St. Werburgh*, Ashby's *Poems*, and one or two others. They have, however, nothing really new for us except to illustrate additionally the break-up of the line and the degradation, more especially, of rhyme-royal.

But perhaps the *St. Werburgh* piece (E.E.T.S.) at least ought to have been mentioned. It is not very specially noteworthy for irregular length of line, though the writer evidently does not trouble himself in the least about this. But it is almost the *ne plus ultra* of sheer prose cut into not very regular lengths, perfunctorily tipped with rhyme, and turned loose. Such books help us, more than anything else, to understand the at first sight unreasonable aversion of some in the next generation or two to rhyme itself.

*Page 266.*—It might not have been ill to mention the comparative prosodic correctness of the English poems ascribed to Charles d'Orléans, in support of the contention advanced in this context.

*Page 335.*—If I had written this chapter a little later I should have

given a special notice to the rhymed doggerel of *Respublica* (*E.E.T.S.*), which has some peculiarities.

Page 371.—“Inarticulatenesses like the final *e*.” I intend no disrespect to this syllable or vocable in any other language; especially none to it in German, where it often gives occasion for the most exquisite melody. But we seem to have lost, if indeed we ever had, the proper pronunciation of it; and we want broader vowel-sound than we usually have to bring out by contrast that pronunciation, little more than a breath as it should be. (Compare the final line of Baroness Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach’s delightful poemlet—*Ein kleines Lied*—

Und eine ganze Seele.)

We can still get something of the kind with the participle *-ed* and a strong vowel sound behind it; but the *y* sound in “pretty,” “pony,” etc., is very unmanageable, and we have hardly any other for valued final *e* alone in English.

BOOK V

THE TIME OF SHAKESPEARE

VOL. II



## CHAPTER I

### SHAKESPEARE AND BLANK VERSE

Retrospect of Chaucer, Surrey, etc.—The line of the University Wits—Shakespeare—The order to be taken with his work—*Titus Andronicus*—*The Comedy of Errors*—*Love's Labour's Lost*—*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*—*Romeo and Juliet*—*A Midsummer Night's Dream*—*All's Well that Ends Well*—The Early Histories and their Doubles—*King John*—The "Doubles" generally—*Henry VI.*—*Richard III.*—*Henry IV.*—*Richard II.*—*The Merchant of Venice*—The later plays—*The Tempest*—The later (?) Comedies—*The Merry Wives*—*Measure for Measure*—*As You Like It*—*Taming of the Shrew*—*Twelfth Night*—*Much Ado*—*The Winter's Tale*—The other English Histories—*Henry V.*—*Henry VIII.*—*Troilus and Cressida*—*Timon of Athens*—*Coriolanus*—*Julius Caesar*—*Antony and Cleopatra*—The Four Great Tragedies—*Macbeth*—*Hamlet*—*King Lear*—*Othello*—*Cymbeline*—*Pericles*—General considerations—The pause—The trisyllabic foot and its revival—The redundant syllable—Enjambment—The morphology and biology of blank verse—*The Poems*—*Venus and Adonis*—*Lucrece*—*The Sonnets*—Miscellaneous metres, the octosyllable—Decasyllabic couplets—The Songs—Note on *The Passionate Pilgrim*, etc.

It is perhaps desirable, though some pains were taken to make the point clear long before the close of the last volume,<sup>1</sup> to repeat that the attention paid to Spenser, and the praise bestowed on him, involve no disregard, and still less any dispraise, of his fellow-workers in prosody and poetry during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. That he was a great master in both senses—that he gave actual, direct, almost pedagogic instruction to many of these

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* pp. 330, 333.

contemporaries—there can be no doubt whatever. But that they would have achieved, perhaps more slowly and uncertainly, something of the same result without him, there can be as little. Some of them, we know, worked in common with him; others may very well have worked independently. All shared, in their several degrees, the new afflatus of which he had the greatest share next to Shakespeare's. That great exception, moreover, and others, worked in a direction which he did not even try—putting the "sports" of the first *Visions*<sup>1</sup> aside. With these, and with their master and king, we shall therefore now deal. And we shall first deal—reverting in Spenser's own fashion to some personages of the last volume so as to knit and to exhibit the continuity and vitality of the story—with that almost greatest and certainly most idiosyncratic development of English poetry, the unrhymed decasyllable or blank verse. Under this we shall consider Shakespeare, and those about Shakespeare, who practised it. But as with Chaucer and Spenser in the past, as with all the greatest in the future, we shall not allow a mere hidebound distinction of kind to prevent us from surveying all the prosodic work of Shakespeare himself in this chapter. For this also will throw out tentacles of connection with what is to come, as well as with what is past, and thus again serve to maintain in evidence the vitality and the continuity of the subject.

Retrospect of  
Chaucer,  
Surrey, etc.

Blank verse, to throw back a little, had, as has been noticed, made its appearance in a rather puzzling fashion in Chaucer's prose *Tale of Melibee*. It might, no doubt, be possible to find scattered decasyllables in other early prose, for the iambic is a natural, if not *the* natural rhythm of modern English; but I do not remember so many together.<sup>2</sup> It is at least no unreasonable supposition that Chaucer, with his head full of the decasyllabic mould, even though he had made up his mind not to *rhyme*—*i.e.* not

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. pp. 351, 359, 360.

<sup>2</sup> There is, of course, the famous—

And many a song, and many a lecherous lay  
in the Palinode to the *Canterbury Tales*, and others.



to give the characteristic of verse as he thought it—should slip into verse-*rhythm* unintentionally, and perhaps without even observing it. But the conditions, precedent and surrounding, of this phenomenon are too absolutely obscure to make it much worth while to discuss it further. We have likewise spoken of Surrey's first regular attempts at the form, and have noted that, naturally and almost unavoidably, there is a tendency in them to make line and clause coincide, and (as naturally if not quite so inevitably) no great advance towards the discovery of the secret of pause-variation.<sup>1</sup> The same remark applied to the earliest blank-verse plays, *Gorboduc*, the *Misfortunes*, etc. And we saw that even the Marlowe-and-Peele or Peele-and-Marlowe group, great as was the advance which they made, never quite achieved that combination of internal dissimilarity and external communication which is necessary for the triumph of the vehicle. But we promised some more remarks upon this subject, and the time has now come to give them.

It is probably not superfluous, at the beginning of a new volume, thus to pick up again the points which were lightly touched upon in this respect in the last : especially

<sup>1</sup> A reviewer reproached me, not without some reason, for neglecting specially to notice Gascoigne's blank verse in *The Steel Glass*. It was the usual case of hesitation exactly where to place the notice, ending in its being placed nowhere. The sample is chiefly interesting as one of its author's numerous tentatives in nearly or wholly new style. It has no very special characteristics, but shares with all its early kin those of strongly single-moulded lines, abundant *epanaphora*, etc. But a specimen should be given :—

And on their backs they bear both land and fee,  
Castles and towers, revenues and receipts,  
Lordships and manors, fines,—yea farms—and all.  
"What should these be?" (speak you, my lovely lord?)  
They be not men : for why, they have no beards.  
They be no boys, which wear such sidelong gowns.  
They be no gods, for all their gallant gloss.  
They be no devils, I trow, which seem so saintish.  
What be they? women? masking in men's weeds  
With dutchkin doublets and with jerkins jagged?  
With Spanish spangs, and ruffs set out of France,  
With high copt hats and feathers flaunt-a-flaunt?  
They be, so sure, even *woe* to *men* indeed.

There are one or two other instances of non-dramatic blanks within the sixteenth century, but they are quite unimportant.

The line of  
the University  
Wits.

that of the main one—the excessively *integral* character of the line in these poets. The consecrated term of “end-stopped” is open to the objection that it may easily convey a wrong idea—that of end-*punctuated*; and that even if this is escaped, the mere stoppage of the line at the end is not the whole of the matter. It is true that a very large—an enormous—proportion of their lines have (or ought to have) stops at the end; but it is also true that many which have not, even in modern editions, and perhaps ought not to have, on any reasonable theory of punctuation, are still end-*lopped* if not *-stopped*. Here are three examples, selected, according to our favourite principle, almost at haphazard, certainly not on any principle of “packing the jury”—

And tempted more than ever creature was  
With wealth, with beauty, and with chivalry.

PEELE, *Arraignment of Paris*.

The framing of this circle on the ground  
Brings whirlwinds, tempests, thunder and light[e]ning.

MARLOWE, *Doctor Faustus*.

That God sends down his hateful wrath for sin  
On such as never heard his prophets speak.

LODGE and GREENE (?)  
*Looking-Glass for London and England*.

Now in none of these distichs, save, perhaps, the first, could a comma properly be placed at the end of the first line; yet in each there is a certain completeness of clause which shuts the sense in. Moreover, these plays exhibit something else, not quite so glaringly evident, which will emerge to the attentive reader if he brings his mind's ear to the reading, and still more if he reads aloud. The lines are not merely stopped at the end, but they are constructed to stop at the end. They are moulded individually, not collectively. Even in those very greatest passages cited formerly<sup>1</sup>—the *locus classicus* on poetry in *Tamburlaine*, the death-agony of Faustus, the great

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. pp. 347, 348.

speech of Bathsheba, and the rest—they are literally “some dozen or sixteen *lines*” (is it one of the “points in Hamlet’s soul” that he meant this?), making, it is true, a whole of beauty, but separable into line-parts as Shakespeare’s own greatest things are not. The effect is cumulative; the poet adds line after line to produce it, as you hitch the grooved weight-disks on a steel-yard. It is a dropping fire not a volley, a shower not a cascade. So inherent and ingrained is this characteristic that it survives and neutralises the most audacious enjambment<sup>1</sup> in grammar, which does sometimes occur in these poets. As for instance in the *Jew of Malta*—

Three thousand camels, and two hundred yoke  
Of labouring oxen, and five hund[e]red  
She-asses—

where, do what you will, you cannot run the “five hundred she-asses” rhythmically together.

There can be very little question that this peculiarity, surviving and resisting even the immense *poetical* advance which these poets made, is a great disadvantage. It is least felt in the Faustus speech, because that supreme agony consists with—almost invites—separated and ejaculatory expression. The Bathsheba passage is mainly descriptive; and description is of its essence cumulative: while the miraculous utterance of Tamburlaine is, as it were, a succession of half-gasping attempts to express that inexpressible of which it speaks. But turn to the only less fine

Leicester, if gentle words would comfort me

of *Edward the Second*. It also is wonderful; but how one longs for one minute of Shakespeare to turn it from a string of dazzling beads to a ringed and winged serpent of colour and fire! Almost every line has an actual stop at the end, and those which have not—for instance

And so it fares with me, whose dauntless mind  
The ambitious Mortimer would seek to curb—

---

<sup>1</sup> This word has to be used so often that I shall henceforward take the liberty of Anglicising it invariably.

are too stiffly and rigidly constructed towards the close to run on as they should. And if this is the case in the greatest passages of all, what must it be, what is it, in the less great? A perpetual hobble, as it were, in the pace; an ever-officious obstacle and blocking in the wind-stroke or the oarage of poetry. In the worst examples of all, even more unpleasant metaphors suggest themselves; the verses positively *hiccup* in their abrupt severance of rhythm and of meaning. Not that there are not glimpses of better things. After the above-quoted great speech of Edward, and two or three other long ones, less good in the same style, there is one in which Marlowe nearly shakes himself free—

Oh! would I might! but heaven and earth conspire  
To make me miserable.

He of you all that most desires my blood,  
And will be called the murderer of a king,  
Take it.

And Isabel, whose eyes, being turned to steel,  
Will sooner sparkle fire than shed a tear.

Yet he has not got entirely free of the single-moulded line even here. In another speech (of Isabel's own) he comes even nearer; and it is at least noteworthy that it draws upon her the rebuke of her lover Mortimer—

Nay, Madam, if you be a warrior,  
You must not grow so passionate in speeches.

Yet the passion had been able to fuse the ordinary *stichomythia*<sup>1</sup> into this—

Our kindest friends in Belgia have we left  
To cope with friends at home; a heavy case  
When force to force is knit, and sword and glaive  
In civil broils make kin and countrymen  
Slaughter themselves in others, and their sides  
With their own weapons gored! But what's the help?  
Misgoverned kings are cause of all this wreck;

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<sup>1</sup> The word is, of course, ordinarily and properly used of conversation in alternate single lines. But I employ it here because this conversation necessarily generates a line of the type I am discussing.

And, Edward, thou art one among them all,  
Whose looseness hath betrayed thy land to spoil,  
Who made the channel overflow with blood  
Of thine own people.

It is to be feared that Mortimer had no ears for "a good metre and a plentiful vein," even from fair and, to him, loving lips. Earlier, in the Herald's speech to Edward, oratory does the task of passion to some extent, as in

That from your princely person you remove  
This Spenser, as a putrefying branch  
That deadens the royal vine.

And of course there would be no difficulty in producing other instances, both from Marlowe himself and from the rest of the group, as in the speech of Jonas in *A Looking-Glass for London and England*—

Lo! Israel once that flourished like the vine  
Is barren laid; the beautiful increase  
Is wholly blent, and irreligious zeal  
Encampeth there where virtue was enthroned;

or in that of Paris in *The Arraignment*—

Sacred and just, thou great and dreadful Jove,  
And you, thrice-reverend powers, whom love nor hate  
May wrest awry; if this to me a man,  
This fortune, fatal be, that I must plead, etc.

But, as a rule, this sort of welding of the lines together, and the tempering and annealing of the line itself that makes it possible, are neglected. They do not seem to have come within the scope and purview of the writer. Even when, as not so very frequently happens, there is a full or at any rate heavy stop in the middle or towards the two ends, it is not utilised for the purpose; the old *anhelitus* or gasp at the end of the line, occasioned by the omission to take minor inhalation during its course, seems to beset the poet. And, misty as all the chronology of the theatre of the period is, we do know that when Shakespeare came to town, and heard or read the work of these men, this kind of blank-verse rhythm must have been what he read or heard.

Shakespeare.

He did not alter it at once ; even he could not have altered it at once without a miracle, and an unwholesome sort of miracle too. There was no reason why the ordinary laws of growth, which our prosody so admirably exemplifies, should be altered in his case ; and had they been so, even his versification could hardly have displayed that perfect naturalness and infinite variety which it actually possesses, but would have shown only a hard and machine-like consummateness—within limits—after the Racinian or Popian manner. Like Chaucer, like Spenser, Shakespeare, beyond all reasonable doubt, experimented ; and though we shall not here attempt to fix the order of the experiments with the rashness which some have shown, every canon of criticism, external and internal alike, when reasonably applied, gives us sufficient data. Taking the Meres list as the positive and not reasonably disputable *terminus ad quem* externally given, and applying to it (with “exception for errors”) the internal signs of less or more maturity in handling diction and metre alike, we may rank *Titus Andronicus*, the *Comedy of Errors*, and *Love’s Labour’s Lost* as the earliest ; the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *All’s Well that Ends Well* (if it is *Love’s Labour’s Found*) next ; the historical plays mentioned by Meres with the addition (in any degree of “doubtfulness” that the reader may please) of *Henry VI.* overlapping this second batch in no very certain order ; and *The Merchant of Venice*, in part at least, last. But I ought to say that it seems to me pretty certain that some (and perhaps many) of the plays represent very different stages, and were in all probability begun, suspended, and finished with more or less rewriting, sometimes at long intervals.<sup>1</sup>

The order to  
be taken with  
his work

<sup>1</sup> In making the above order (which Heaven forefend that I should propose as “matter of breviary” !) I have been guided, as is surely here not improper, mainly by the plain evidences of prosodic improvement. As for *Titus Andronicus*, the statement of Meres is sufficient evidence to me that Shakespeare did write on the subject : and I have myself read Shakespeare (ever since I could read anything) to no purpose if there is anything in the play we have that Shakespeare might not have written, though I do not say that it is all his. As for *Henry VI.*, the fantastic attempts that used to be made, twenty or thirty years ago, to parcel it out among the “Wits,” have

If Shakespeare did not write the *Titus Andronicus* that we have, there was another person living at that time who had a Shakespearian genius, who was passing through exactly the stage that Shakespeare must have passed through, and who is afterwards lost sight of. For the many beauties which chequer its prodigality of horrors are of a distinctly different type from the Marlowesque, are above anything in Kyd and the others at this time, and are still more markedly different from anything in Middleton, Webster, and the rest of the younger generation. But whether Shakespeare wrote it or not, it is of equal value to us as prosodic stuff and stage. For it is almost certainly the work of a man who, either going through the same process as the Marlowe group or studying their work directly, is in the main and consciously working with the same single-verse mould that they worked with. The First Act contains all but five hundred lines; and though they are not invariably stopped—that is, punctuated—at the end, I have, in reading them over again carefully, detected hardly one that is not of this mould—that does not invite the suspension of voice or of eye at the close of the line. And this prevails throughout the play, even in those numerous fine passages (to my thinking, quite clearly Shakespearian in themselves) which lighten its darkness. The soliloquy of Aaron opening Act II.; the charming one of Titus at the beginning of the next scene, and that of Tamora in the third; even the famous and splendid lines of Martius—

Upon his bloody finger he doth wear;

the pathetic, if conceited, lamentations of Titus and Marcus over Lavinia; and the brave rhetorical addresses of Marcus and Lucius at the end,—all bear this impression, indelibly and unmistakably stamped on them.

But the man who wrote them, be he, let it be once

---

had their day. Most of the three parts represent, of course, rehandling of older work; but again I see no reason to question the fact of Shakespeare having been the rehandler. That many things, especially the part of Margaret as we have it, are his, I dare swear.

more repeated, Shakespeare or another, is a man of genius, if yet only in his nonage, and he represents and has the advantages of a stage farther than Marlowe himself could traverse. Even more distinctly, therefore, than in Marlowe himself does passion (according to the lover of Isabel) or something else run the moulds of his verse together. It may be fanciful to think that he made some resistance to this agency; but this is just what a conscientious student of style does do. At any rate, there are passages where the fusion has taken place, and we may take two of them—one from the *threnos* above mentioned (there are others there), and the other the well-known proclamation of unbelief by Aaron. The first shows most interestingly how actual punctuation at the end of lines by no means prevents the continuity, if the rises and falls, the weightings and lightenings, within the line are observed :—

Come, let's fall to ; and, gentle girl, eat this :  
 Here is no drink ! Hark, Marcus, what she says ;  
 I can interpret all her martyred signs ;  
 She says she drinks no other drink but tears,  
 Brewed with her sorrow, meshed upon her cheeks.  
 Speechless complainer, I will learn thy thought ;  
 In thy dumb action will I be as perfect  
 As begging hermits in their holy prayers :  
 Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,  
 Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,  
 But I of these will wrest an alphabet,  
 And, by still practice, learn to know thy meaning.

Here is the beginning of the verse-paragraph ; and here, again, is a still better example helped by the use—so rare in Marlowe and the others—of the hendecasyllable :—

What if I do not ? as, indeed, I do not ;  
 Yet, for I know thou art religious,  
 And hast a thing within thee, called conscience,  
 With twenty popish tricks and ceremonies,  
 Which I have seen thee careful to observe,  
 Therefore I urge thy oath ; for that I know  
 An idiot holds his bauble for a god,  
 And keeps the oath which by that god he swears.

If anybody says that this last is so prosodically accom-



plished that it must be a later insertion, I shall not quarrel with him much; for he will certainly not damage my argument, but confirm it. It is certain that the verse of the play, as a whole, is "single-moulded" in the sense in which we are using that word. The writer does not yet think of his quantities and pauses as keys, by dwelling on which, or not dwelling on them, he can make connection or break it with the next line, and the next, and the whole symphonic unit. But it is equally certain that there are instances where something of the sort seems to be glimmering upon him.

The *Comedy of Errors* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, especially the latter, supply matter of prosodic interest strikingly different at first sight from that of *Titus Andronicus*; and much more varied, but by no means inconsistent. In *Titus* we have a man who is setting himself—setting his teeth, one may almost say—to the task of carrying out a definite model and pattern in his verse, and who succeeds—almost, if not quite, too well. In the others we have quite conceivably the same man (if that man was Shakespeare) indulging in almost unlimited experiment, constantly breaking out of blank verse altogether, or, if anybody prefers it, only occasionally settling down thereinto. It is, however, extremely noteworthy—indeed, of the first importance—that the staple in blank verse is still the single-moulded line, the line intended to be used cumulatively, and not periodically. That the variety and licence of both, as compared with *Titus*, are at least partly to be accounted for by the fact that both are comedies—that they take the licence which not merely immemorial tradition, but the nature of things, confers on that form in comparison with tragedy—is proper to be mentioned, but can require no insistence.

Of the two, that which actually tickets itself as Comedy *The Comedy of Errors.* is the less interesting prosodically, as in other ways; but its want of interest is only comparative, not positive at all.<sup>1</sup> That much of it is in prose; that much again,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I have always felt pretty sure that we have here some of Shakespeare's very earliest work.

continued for over fifty lines. But there are no pure fourteeners, though the doggerel may sometimes simulate them.

*Love's Labour's  
Lost.*

These last the other play supplies, with much else ; in fact, *Love's Labour's Lost*, so prolific in many ways of disorderly but dear delights, is, unquestionably the "place" for the prosody of the youthful Shakespeare. There is a great deal of prose ; some of it approaching Shakespeare's best in phrase and quality, if full of *péchés de jeunesse* in diction and otherwise. There is the doggerel, occurring chiefly in the speeches of Costard and Nathaniel. There are here undoubted fourteeners (or fifteeners with the double rhyme), which the great Holofernes naturally prefers<sup>1</sup> to doggerel pure and simple. There are stately Alexandrines,<sup>2</sup> most *reviewerishly* criticised by the said Holofernes, but doing credit to the abilities of Biron. There are the couplets and the quatrains, solid and split into conversation, but sometimes of extreme beauty.<sup>3</sup> There are (what we have not had in either of the other plays) early and delicious examples of the lyrics with which we shall deal as a whole presently. And there is the blank verse.

This last is so much scattered among the other experiments that it is far less easy to judge it than in *Titus*, and even than in the *Comedy*. But I think it may be said without rashness that the single-mould line, the cumulative and non-periodic line, still holds the field on the whole. When he is doing things deliberately, the poet seems still to cling to it,—in the king's opening

<sup>1</sup> He also "will something affect the letter [alliterate] for it argues facility," as in

[play"  
praise]

The preylful princess pierced and pricked a pretty pleasing pricket ;  
Some say a sore ; but not a sore, till now made sore with shooting.

<sup>2</sup> If love make me forsworn, how shall I swear to love ?

<sup>3</sup> As those in "Who sees the heavenly Rosaline" which Milton did not miss—

That like a rude and savage man of Inde  
At the first opening of the *gorgeous East*,  
Bows not his vassal head and stricken mind,  
Kisses the base ground with obedient breast.

harangue especially ; in his formal address to the Princess about business ; in most of the set speeches. But once more the fire kindles ; and passion or satire, love or wit, gets the better of his intention, or makes him intend more nobly. It is in the speeches of Biron, the real hero, and of Rosaline, the real heroine, that this happens most frequently and with most felicity. Biron shakes himself half-free in the self-satire on his love at the end of Act III., and is only prevented from doing so fully in the splendid and famous "Who sees the heavenly Rosaline" (quoted already above) by the fact of his own conceit in choosing the quatrain. But in the long speech which gives the "salve for perjury," the "*placebo* and *dirige*" to his and his companions' self-denying ordinance (IV. iii. 290-365), the battle of the blank-verse lines, the "breaking deep" (to quote Adriana as we quoted Mortimer) melting the icy single verses, is a wonderful spectacle. And the "studies" of his lady at the close, with his own interjected remonstrance, show us the wave of the true blank verse all but free,—rejoicing in its freedom and strengthened in its strength.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For when would you, my liege, or you, or you,  
In leaden contemplation have found out  
Such fiery numbers as the prompting eyes  
Of beauty's tutors have enrich'd you with?  
Other slow arts entirely keep the brain ;  
And therefore, finding barren practisers,  
Scarce show a harvest of their heavy toil :  
But love, first learned in a lady's eyes,  
Lives not alone immured in the brain ;  
But, with the motion of all elements,  
Courses as swift as thought in every power,  
And gives to every power a double power,  
Above their functions and their offices.  
It adds a precious seeing to the eye ;  
A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind ;  
A lover's ear will hear the lowest sound,  
When the suspicious head of theft is stopp'd :  
Love's feeling is more soft and sensible  
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails ;  
Love's tongue proves dainty Bacchus gross in taste :  
For valour, is not Love a Hercules,  
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?  
Subtle as Sphinx ; as sweet and musical  
As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair ;

*The Two  
Gentlemen of  
Verona.*

The other comedy, which comes next to these two in hardly disputable prosodic signs of belonging to an early if not the very earliest stage — *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, — is perhaps not to be widely separated from them, except by too curious consideration. Yet there are real *differentiae*. We find excursions into doggerel —

From a pound to a pin, fold it over and over,  
'Tis threefold too little for carrying a letter to your lover ;

and into pure fourteeners —

For often have you writ to her and she in modesty,  
Or else for want of idle time, could not again reply,

---

And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods  
Make heaven drowsy with the harmony.

*Biron.* Studies my lady? mistress, look on me;  
Behold the window of my heart, mine eye,  
What humble suit attends thy answer there:  
Impose some service on me for thy love.

*Ros.* Oft have I heard of you, my Lord Biron,  
Before I saw you; and the world's large tongue  
Proclaims you for a man replete with mocks,  
Full of comparisons and wounding flouts,  
Which you on all estates will execute  
That lie within the mercy of your wit.  
To weed this wormwood from your fruitful brain,  
And therewithal to win me, if you please,  
Without the which I am not to be won,  
You shall this twelvemonth term from day to day  
Visit the speechless sick and still converse  
With groaning wretches; and your task shall be,  
With all the fierce endeavour of your wit  
To enforce the pained impotent to smile.

*Biron.* To move wild laughter in the throat of death?  
It cannot be; it is impossible:  
Mirth cannot move a soul in agony.

*Ros.* Why, that's the way to choke a gibing spirit,  
Whose influence is begot of that loose grace  
Which shallow laughing hearers give to fools:  
A jest's prosperity lies in the ear  
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue  
Of him that makes it: then, if sickly ears,  
Deaf'd with the clamours of their own dear groans,  
Will hear your idle scorns, continue then,  
And I will have you and that fault withal;  
But if they will not, throw away that spirit,  
And I shall find you empty of that fault,  
Right joyful of your reformation.

as well as stanzas, etc. But they are nothing like so frequent as in the *Errors* and in *Love's Labour's Lost*. The blank verse itself, too, is even less run-on than in either of the others—stop or no stop at the end of the line, each is formed with a single respiration. Even Julia's exquisite lines—

She hath been fairer, Madam, than she is—

which supply the unmistakable Shakespearian sign-manual, and (with one or two other things) have given the play a reputation with some good judges that, as a whole, it hardly deserves—are distinctly of this type. But there is in these blank-verse passages a curious feature which we sometimes do not notice, where the verse, as such, is much more accomplished: and that is the presence of the redundant syllable. This appears in the first line of Julia's first soliloquy—

And yet I would I had o'erlooked the letter,

and there are numerous other examples. Yet it may be doubted,—when we come upon such a curious piece of unfinishedness as the quatrain—

Oh, how this spring of love resembleth  
The uncertain glory of an April day,  
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,  
And by and by a cloud takes all away!

with its omission to rhyme the first and third lines, and its unskilful repetition of "all,"—whether in the other case also there is more than the mere carelessness of the novice.

*Love's Labour's Lost*, to return to it for a moment, is in a manner Shakespeare's *Shepherd's Kalendar* for prosodic experiment. But there were more reasons than one why it should not serve him once for all, why he should still "box the compass" of verse. In the first place, the play is a less serious and a more artificial field of art-experiment than the poem; and in the second, though, as we know on good authority, Shakespeare "could be very serious," still seriousness was not quite uppermost with him as it was with Spenser. It would scarcely be erroneous

*Romeo and  
Juliet.*

to say that he never outgrew the period of experiment—at least with blank verse itself. At any rate, with regard to these early plays, each is, and all are, full of it. *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, renews for us the interest of subject, almost of kind, in its relation to prosody. It is a tragedy more really tragic than *Titus* itself; but while there the tragic gloom is unmixed, here there are large stretches of pure comedy and others of pure passion, not necessarily connected with, or tending to, any tragic event at all. In short—in the way in which we are, not, I hope, improperly handling the list—it is our first example of the great English kind of the tragi-comedy. Accordingly, the metre is more varied than in *Titus*, less so than in the three lighter pieces. Doggerel does not appear at all: nor, speaking under correction, do pure fourteeners; while—a more surprising thing considering the subject—there are no lyrics, unless anybody feels inclined to give that name to Mercutio's snatches. But there is some stanza-writing, both in quatrain and sixain (of which latter form Shakespeare was for a time rather fond), and there is very much more admixture of rhyme than in any of the plays we have considered, except in the doggerel passages of them. *Romeo and Juliet*, indeed, might be taken as, in Shakespeare's case, the representative of the battle of the couplet and of blank verse—they are sometimes almost at odds with each other. And those who believe in its being as early as 1591 might take this for an argument on their side, though I should not agree with them.

But from and in this battle there arises a curious and interesting advantage for blank verse itself. The couplet as such, though capable of indefinite linking, always tends rather to stoppage. But even in the stopped form, the structure and rhythm of its decasyllable are markedly different from that of the stopped blank verse; while in the linked or enjambed variety that difference is, of course, largely increased. The result is that portions of couplet-verse, small enough not to allow the rhyme to be prominent, often give a most admirable model for blank verse itself. For instance, the two and a half lines which follow—

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night,  
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear;  
Beauty too rich for use—

are actually, and in their original place, part of a pair of couplets, which are continued by three others. But as they have just been printed they make what we call a "blank-verse clause," itself of almost perfect beauty. When a man is Shakespeare, and produces such an effect as that, even when deliberately doing something else, it is unlikely not to strike him: particularly since he is sure to go on doing it. And by and by he will discard the couplet altogether and use this far superior medium.

Accordingly, we find in the play (not to mention again the things already mentioned, the sonnet prologues and the prose) the most curious alternation, or rather intermixture, of the cumulative and the periodic styles of blank-verse decasyllable. Some speeches, like that of the Prince<sup>1</sup> after the opening brawl, seem to have preserved the older model. Friar Laurence also, in his longer utterances, is rather given to it; and there are many other examples. But Juliet's heart beats throughout to another tune than this sententious clank; her lover, though less uniformly, is master of the better rhythm also; and Mercutio shows that fancy can act as the solvent no less than passion. From his immortal celebration of Queen Mab, through Juliet's

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,

(where the Marlowesque opening changes so wonderfully into the fused music that Marlowe, with all his genius, could hardly reach and never command), to the death-song of Romeo, the new model triumphs. And such a triumph as it obtains in the last (so far as we can guess at the chronology of these pieces) English poetry—nay, the poetry of the world—had not seen. When Dr. Johnson reprehended, in a famous phrase,<sup>2</sup> the mixing of the methods of the poet and the declaimer, he was

<sup>1</sup> See what has been said elsewhere as to speeches of this class.

<sup>2</sup> In discussing Milton's verse-paragraph. (*V. inf.* on Johnson himself.)

unconsciously describing the real virtue of the thing—the application, as no other poetic form has ever mastered it, of the double appeal of poetry and rhetoric, the magical order of poetry and the magical *apparent* freedom of rhetoric. In that exquisite and consummate period—

Why art thou yet so fair? shall I believe  
That unsubstantial death is amorous,  
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps  
Thee here in dark to be his paramour?  
*For fear of that, I still will stay with thee:  
And never from this palace of dim night  
Depart again: here, here will I remain  
With worms that are thy chamber-maids; O, here  
Will I set up my everlasting rest,  
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars,  
From this world-wearied flesh—*

the poet shows that he has nothing left to learn,—that he has everything to teach, with the exception that the redundant syllable and the trisyllabic foot, not being wanted, do not occur. The shift of the pause in the italicised part—fourth syllable in the first line; practically none in the second; fourth in the third, but with strong subsidiaries at fifth and sixth; eighth in the fourth; hardly any in the next two, and the broken line to finish with—is therefore almost the sole device used of a tangible character; but the *κῶλα*, the members of the line, or lines, which these pauses outline, are internally arranged with incomparable subtlety.<sup>1</sup>

*A Midsummer  
Night's  
Dream.*

Next to *Romeo and Juliet* there are strong prosodic reasons for taking *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As a non-tragic pendant to the tragic counterpart, it offers a temptation to do so; and that this is not merely a temptation, is shown by the presence in it of the same admixture of a certain juvenility with power already of the very highest. Perhaps there is a little touch of

<sup>1</sup> I hope many of my readers will excuse what only a few may need—the reminder that I have not the slightest intention of suggesting that Shakespeare said to himself, “Go to: let us put a pause at the 5th place, that we may produce this or that effect.” Nor do I think that, in the same century, Titian said, “Let us bend such and such of our muscles in such and such a manner that we may draw Ariadne.” But they both did it.



further age in it—more critical and satiric grasp, nicer composition,—but all this is for another story. Prosodically, it comes in as hardly anything else could. We must once more remember that we have here the comic licence of variety ; and the fact that that variety does not run, as it does in the *Errors* and in *Love's Labour's Lost*, to doggerel, shows a further advance. The fact that it does run to great lengths shows that we are still at an early stage of the poet's development. The beautiful octosyllables and the serious lyrics we shall take later with their kin ; but the burlesques of the "tedious, brief scene" are too important prosodically, and too unique not to require a short separate treatment at once.

We have seen above (Vol. i. Bk. iii. Ch. I.) that the original dramatic performances of the guilds indulged in an extreme prosodic variety, and we have also seen (*ibid.*) that, in the Interludes and other sixteenth-century successors of these, doggerel of various kinds rode almost sovereign. Shakespeare seems to have seen his opportunity for a dramatic *Sir Thopas* here, and he certainly made the most of it. That he is not always original—that, for instance, the "misperusing" of poor Quince's Prologue is borrowed from *Ralph Roister Doister*, whose author (as Thackeray says of another subject) no doubt borrowed it from somebody else—does not matter. The absurdity combined with the prosodic correctness and almost ease of the stanzas, the couplets, and the short-lined lyrics is *impayable*, except with recognition of its merits, and of the indication which it gives of its author's prosodic progress.

In the body of the play there is a good deal of rhymed couplet, just as there is in *Romeo and Juliet* ; but in the blank-verse staple there is a most remarkable change. In the tragedy, as we saw, the crude and the perfect blank verse—the medium which is still made up, like a surveyor's measuring-chain, of units linked together, and that which is as integral and undulating as a serpent—alternate with each other. Such alternation is not absent in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but the live variety has

altogether the upper hand. Even the short opening speeches<sup>1</sup> of Theseus and Hippolyta are couched in it: and though the Duke's second speech falls back rather into the older strain of these set harangues, that of Egeus (which follows so quickly, and which in any earlier play would probably, as we have seen, have been quite of the chain-pattern) is not. But in the great Oberon and Titania passage of the Second Act comes one of the most important *loci* for our purpose.) Most of this would earlier have been in the stiffer form, for the speeches are long and set. Nor is this form quite absent; but it is constantly fused, not, as in some other pieces that we have seen, by passion or by fancy, so much as by the poet's growing facility in the other and higher kind, and his conscious, or unconscious, conviction that it *is* the higher. Redundant syllables and trisyllabic feet are still absent, as a rule; but in other ways the newer kind is victorious, and the older (see Puck's speech in Act III. Sc. ii.) seems actually to be taking refuge in the couplet passages when it has been driven out of its ancient stronghold of "blanks"—a most curious instance of the "exchange of rapiers." The rhymed part of the central scene of confusion goes out of its way to be single-moulded. Helena's pathetic blank-verse appeals are almost completely interknitted. So, too, *indignatio facit* "blancos" *versus* for Hermia later; and her passion gets in even the trisyllabic foot in—

And with | her per|sonage<sup>2</sup> her | tall per|sonage.

*All's Well  
that Ends  
Well.*

The most puzzling and (but for Parolles and, perhaps, Lafeu) the most un-Shakespearian of all the plays, *All's Well that Ends Well*, although it is not exactly a puzzle prosodically, is not very easy to place in the combined respect of prosody and chronology. There is none of the early medley—prose, blank verse, and the usual drop

<sup>1</sup> This is probably because they *are* short, and not of the tirade or harangue kind.

<sup>2</sup> On what some people call an extra-metrical syllable here, to escape the abhorred trisyllabic foot, see later. As for others, who would read "pursnidge" in one place and the proper word in the other, *non ragioniam*.

into couplet pretty well exhaust its variety. But the man who wrote it, whosoever he was, and at whatsoever time he wrote, seems to be experimenting with blank verse itself in a rather different fashion from that which we find in any other play, earlier or later. Thus the King's speech in II. iii.—

'Tis only title thou disdain'st in her, the which—

(an Alexandrine, in itself noteworthy) is evidently written with a definite attempt to break up the lines—

In differences so mighty. If she be  
It is a dropsied honour. Good alone  
Is good without a name. Vileness is so :  
The property by what it is should go,  
Not by the title.

But, it will be observed, the speaker has already dropped into rhyme, in which he continues to the end of the speech ; and his junctures want the nail—they are harsh and grating. Yet there are attempts here, much more often than earlier, at the other great devices for variation—trissyllabic feet and redundant syllables—besides occasional Alexandrines, as noted.<sup>1</sup>

Two curiously ugly but representative speeches follow each other in II. i. :—

*King.* I knew him.  
*Hel.* The rather will I spare my praises towards him ;  
Knowing him is enough. On's bed of death  
Many receipts he gave me ; chiefly one,  
Which, as the dearest issue of his practice,  
And of his old experience the only darling,  
He bade me store up, as a triple eye,  
Safer than mine own two, more dear ; I have so ;  
And, hearing your high majesty is touch'd  
With that malignant cause wherein the honour  
Of my dear father's gift stands chief in power,  
I come to tender it and my appliance  
With all bound humbleness.

*King.* We thank you, maiden ;  
But may not be so credulous of cure,  
When our most learned doctors leave us and  
The congregated college have concluded  
That labouring art can never ransom nature  
From her maidible estate ; I say we must not  
So stain our judgement, or corrupt our hope,

The Early  
Histories and  
their Doubles.

The early historical plays mentioned by Meres, and the enigmatical *Henry VI.* batch, will be best taken together from the prosodic point of view. As is well known, Shakespeare's part in most of them is mixed up with other and probably earlier work, to a rather bewildering extent. But it is the great advantage of our subject and our method that the question of authorship hardly concerns us at all, or only indirectly and secondarily. It is the "Progress of Prosody" which the present writer, not being able to "sing," is ambitious to "say." And of this progress there is plentiful and interesting evidence in comparing the two sets. The blank verse, for instance, of *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* is, as is that of all the doubles,<sup>1</sup> strongly of the "University," the single-moulded, the cumulative type. Nor has Shakespeare himself quite, though he has partly, broken with the type—he is in the *Romeo and Juliet* not the *Titus Andronicus* stage of his apprenticeship. When he sees a possible good line, if it is only a string of names like

That England, Ireland, Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine,  
he takes and turns it into an actually good one of the same type—

To Ireland, Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine.

---

To prostitute our past-cure malady  
To empirics, or to dissever so  
Our great self and our credit, to esteem  
A senseless help when help past sense we deem.

For trisyllabics see Helena's speech to the widow at the end of Act III.—

When I have found it. The count he woos your daughter,  
Resolved to carry her : let her in fine consent,  
Since the first father wore it : this ring he holds.

All at the cæsura ; all explicable, if anybody likes such things, as "extra-metrical" ; all exceedingly ugly ; but all, according to my notation, distinctly trisyllabic. The author of all these things is clearly experimenting ; but his *Love's Labour* is not yet *Won*, though we take his play here on the chance that Meres may have so named it.

<sup>1</sup> I use for this work Hazlitt's reprint, with additions, of Collier's *Shakespeare's Library*, 6 vols., London, 1875.

But generally he re-founds the metre as completely as *King John*. the diction; and the dull stump of the original changes into the passionate or fanciful airs of the rehandling as if by miracle. The form of the blank verse is still of the austerer kind, but in that kind it gives some of his greatest and best known triumphs, proceeding from still cumulative specimens (though the cumulation is here disguised by the Bastard's abundant fancy), like Falconbridge's soliloquy on his Lackland Knighthood, through the stately tirades of the kings and the First Citizen, through Constance's never-to-be-hackneyed despair, and the other famous pieces, all slightly single-line in their constitution, till, as usual, the greatest passion of all brings the point of projection with it, and an impeccable specimen in the later kind is given by the wonderful lines which wrest pity for almost the vilest of all heroes—

Poison'd,—ill fare—dead, forsook, cast off:<sup>1</sup>  
 And none of you will bid the winter come  
 To thrust his icy fingers in my maw,  
 Nor let my kingdom's rivers take their course  
 Through my burn'd bosom, nor entreat the north  
 To make his bleak winds kiss my parched lips  
 And comfort me with cold.<sup>2</sup>

As for the "rough copy" plays themselves, comparatively few remarks must serve them, though it would be interesting (to the writer, that is to say) to be much more diffuse. They stand in three classes prosodically. *The True Tragedy of Richard III.* and *The Famous Victories of Henry V.* are in almost the lowest stage of blank-verse doggerel, as we may call it, though they acquire considerable interest, when we compare them with that other stage to which we shall come in the decadence of blank verse itself, some half century later. It will not, of course, do to judge them merely as printed; for some of the prose passages are clearly verse in intention, and many of the verse passages were probably meant to be simple prose. It is, however, rare that even a tolerable single

The Doubles  
generally.

<sup>1</sup> Note the "pause-foot" or half-foot here in the first line.

<sup>2</sup> The actually last speech ("O cousin, thou art come") is single-moulded again.

line emerges, while a tolerable batch of lines is almost unknown. *The Troublesome Raigne*, on the other hand, is a very fair, though by no means a first-rate specimen of the chain-stitch blank verse of the Wits. And in the two parts of the *Contention*, compared with the three of *Henry VI.*, we have one of the most attractive special prosodic studies imaginable, though one of which only the general results can be indicated here.

*Henry VI.* Generally speaking, the process of editing is performed by persons who have not genius, upon persons who have.<sup>1</sup> Here the positions are capitally and signally reversed. One parallel (from the great passage of the Cardinal's death) will prove this as well as fifty. The *Contention* has—

Lord Cardinal, if thou diest assured of Heavenly bliss  
Hold up thy hand and make some sign to us.  
Oh, see! he dies, and makes no sign at all!  
Oh God! forgive his soul!

In *Henry VI.* it is—

Lord Cardinal! if thou think'st on Heaven's bliss,  
Hold up thy hand; make signal of thy hope!  
He dies and makes no sign. O God! forgive him!

Shakespeare for a thousand ducats: even *Aut Diabolus* being out of the question in the circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

*Richard III.* Of the other historical plays mentioned by Meres, *Richard the Third*, despite the glorious things that it contains, bears the earliest appearance prosodically. The splendid opening soliloquy of Gloucester still has the pant, the gasp, of the older model, and its intrinsic uniformity; and so have Anne's Prologue and Gloucester's own central speech in the incomparable wooing-scene,

<sup>1</sup> I believe I have edited enough myself to say this without impertinence to others.

<sup>2</sup> If space permitted, many other things in this most interesting trilogy would be discussed. The great Towton speech of the King, III. II. v. ("This battle fares like to the morning's war"), is a text for a complete sermon on Shakespeare's blank verse in the apprenticeship period; and it would not be difficult to make up the "fifty" referred to in the text. I own to very great affection for *Henry VI.* It is a historical novel of the best kind, with the joy of verse added.

which is the triumph of impossibility made probable as far as dramatic character is concerned ; and the Prince's Mephistophelian conclusion thereto. Even Margaret's magnificent

I called thee, then, vain flourish of my fortune

is the very paragon of the style. Marlowe himself, though he shoots higher for a little space here and there, never holds the heavens of declamation in which passion does *not* sleep, so royally and long.<sup>1</sup> Only in the two *apices* of the whole, the Clarence passage and Richard's desperate awakening (with perhaps the repentant death-words of Edward) is the other and greater method tried with complete success ; and even in these the mould of the verse tends towards rigidity. It is as if Shakespeare, in this chronologically final division of the long pageant of historic tragedy which his predecessors had attempted with such varying success, determined to give the method of those predecessors its full chance—to get out of it everything that could be got—and so an end.

It would be in accordance with such a plan that the *Henry IV.* play is almost wholly in verse. In *Henry IV.*, on the other hand, the best and most characteristic passages, as was necessitated by the grasp of comedy which the author had now made sure, are wholly in prose, or versed only in snatches which are mainly burlesque. The blank verse would seem to have received no very special attention ; and though a good deal of it is in the older model, the newer seems to come from him less of deliberate purpose than because his hand was getting accustomed to it. The King opens (as usual) in the one, and Hotspur denies

<sup>1</sup> If the play were not among the most universally known even of Shakespeare's, I think I must have quoted this gorgeous tirade. It has redundant syllables (six out of some thirty) ; but, as we have seen, though the frequency of these is a mark of lateness, their occasional occurrence does not prevent a piece being early. And they are mostly "very little ones" :—*fortune*, *bubble*, *brothers*, *widow*, *sorrow*. There is one trisyllabic foot (the flat|tering in|dex), but it is easily slurred. On the other hand, the "single-mould" is all but universal ; *epanaphora* (which disjoins the lines specially) is prominent, and it bears the full hall-mark of the workshop of which it is one of the greatest triumphs.

that he denied his prisoners in the other. But he himself relapses in the "Cankered Bolingbroke" harangue to his father and uncle, and comes back again in his satire on Glendower. Lady Percy is very nearly perfect in the newer numbers, when she tries to keep her father-in-law from rushing on his fate; and, the King is between the two in his celebrated apostrophe to Sleep: while the Prince, as is fitting, "likes the youngest best," in his to the Crown. In fact the poet is by this time nearly at mastery of the newer measure in its older form—that which has got over the stand-off disposition of the lines towards each other, but has not yet completely achieved variety of music and structure in the lines themselves.

*Richard II.* The prosodic, like the other interest of *Richard II.*, arising from the comparison with Marlowe on the other hapless "Second," is exceptional, and it can hardly escape any reader who has got beyond the state of thinking prosody pedantry. There can, of course, be not the slightest doubt that it was written under the influence of the hardly older but rather more precocious poet and his fellows; nor is there any play which is more likely to have been the direct occasion of Greene's splenetic outburst. The single-line model is conspicuous throughout; and there are few finer instances of it anywhere than in the famous "rally" of Gaunt and his exiled son—

All places that the eye of Heaven visits

O who can hold a fire in his hand,<sup>1</sup>

to the King's final soliloquy just before his murder. But whereas in *Titus Andronicus* this model showed but a few marks of approaching change by fusion, here these marks are ubiquitous. Even in some of the passages just referred to they appear. It is specially curious to notice how, in the great patriotic speech of Gaunt, the central

<sup>1</sup> Both these are good instances of the distinction I have tried to draw between the "single-moulded" and the merely "end-stopped" line.



passage,<sup>1</sup> although almost every line is self-enclosed *as* a line, the paragraph-effect is given in a way that Marlowe hardly ever attains, by the variation of the pause, the weighting of different parts of the line by the quicksilver power of specially sonorous or important words, and sometimes by a cunning parenthetical device which makes the voice hurry over parts of a line, or whole lines, so as to connect, rhythmically as in sense, what comes after with what comes before. Indeed the rhetorical - poetical "colour" which Shakespeare has conveyed to his blank verse in this play, may vie with almost anything later; though the actual drawing and composition of the lines are less varied and delicate. This is the case with Richard's speech to Aumerle, his despairing reception of the news of the death of his friends, and his other "epideictics." And it is worth observing that the charge, so often brought against this play, that the rhetorical character rather outvies the strictly poetical, whether just or not (which does not concern us), connects itself very interestingly with the undoubted prosodic symptoms and stage of it. It is the work of a man at once striving

<sup>1</sup> This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,  
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise,  
This fortress built by Nature for herself  
Against infection and the hand of war,  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall  
Or as a moat defensive to a house,  
Against the envy of less happier lands,  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,  
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,  
Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth,  
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,  
For Christian service and true chivalry,  
As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry  
Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's Son,  
This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,  
Dear for her reputation through the world,  
Is now leased out, I die pronouncing it,  
Like to a tenement or pelting farm:  
England, bound in with the triumphant sea,  
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege  
Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame,  
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds.

(whether consciously or not does not in the least matter) to write up to a certain model, *and beyond it*. Nobody, not even Shakespeare, could do this without producing a certain effect of artifice and labour.

*The Merchant  
of Venice.*

The last of the Meres-mentioned plays, *The Merchant of Venice*, from its being one of the most popular of all, both in stage and study, has also been one of those which have attracted the most prosodic attention. It has, however, from this point of view unnecessarily puzzled those who are unhappy unless they can assign a date, and a fixed one, to each play as a whole. As for me, I judge, *securus*, that it is one of those which represent not necessarily very long intervals, but certainly intervals, of work, with correspondingly different stages of study, practice, and accomplishment. Not even *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, though the actual variety of metre in it may be greater, has passages representing such different grades of apprenticeship and craftsmanship. The Casket scenes, especially those with Morocco and Arragon, are notoriously of the earlier type—not directly Marlowesque, for there is much more enjambment than in Marlowe, but sententious and staccato for all that enjambment. Not a few of the earlier set speeches, especially that of Salarino about the dangers of the sea, are of the half-and-half kind: while ✓not merely Portia's diploma-piece for her doctor's gown but many other speeches of hers, nearly all of Shylock's, and much else, are on the perfectly or almost perfectly fused model—not far from *Antony and Cleopatra* itself.

*The later  
plays.*

After Meres's list we have, in fact, no thoroughly satisfactory dates for Shakespearian production; though we know too well when that production must have stopped. The apparently more certain evidences of entries of licensing or printing, the order of performance, and the infinitely uncertain ones of allusion to events which commentators have worked so hard, would be treacherous testimony for us anyhow; and, as it happens, we do not want them. The actual prosodic progress—from a *pot-pourri* of metres with stiff blank verse, or

from the latter alone, to a complete command of blank verse itself; and then, perhaps, a slight tendency, not exactly to abuse but to use very lavishly the redundant syllable—is logically too convincing and too well supported by the general comparison of the plays before 1598 with the plays after it, to need much argument. Having once laid down the law of it, a slight survey of these plays themselves, for the most part in their canonical (though most certainly *not* chronological order), will suffice.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the heretical eccentrics who deny the late-*The Tempest*.  
ness of *The Tempest* may have to say for themselves (I have never been able to discover in it anything of value) on other grounds, it is certain that they can derive no countenance from prosody. It is simply impossible, to any one who has made a careful prosodic study of the plays in the Meres list, that *The Tempest* should be early. There is hardly so much as a trace of the old staccato line, even in passages such as Ariel's to the "three men of sin," and some of Prospero's which would, in the early period, have irresistibly invited it. The couplets of the Masque, indeed, show something of the type; but there is no reason whatever why *these* should not have been written earlier, and perhaps without any view to their actual place of appearance. On the other hand, the actual type is of the most advanced kind—the "fingering" of the overlapped lines exhibiting absolutely perfect mastery, and the abundant redundances indicating that tendency, almost to take liberties with licence, which was to prove so dangerous when the wand slipped out of Prospero's hand.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I fear my arrangement may prove teasing to some readers; but I do not see my way to alteration. For I wish at any cost to avoid a hard-and-fast ordering, even on purely prosodic grounds, inasmuch as I do not believe in the possibility of such a thing on any; and I wish to respect, as far as possible, the solid facts of the Meres list, the Folio contents, and the parallelism of the inside and outside *Histories*.

<sup>2</sup> This is not a *Beauties of Shakespeare*; but it can hardly be inexcusable to note that the very Mount Everest of the blank verse region—the passage that is "rounded with a sleep," the deepest peace over the highest peak—occurs in *The Tempest*.

The later (?)  
Comedies.  
*The Merry  
Wives.*

*The Merry Wives* (we shall silently pass over the plays already mentioned) is very largely prose, or blank verse of the masterly prose-verse style elsewhere to be noted. The exceptions are not prosodically very remarkable, but rather of the accomplished early time than of a later.

*Measure for  
Measure.*

*Measure for Measure*, however, is, in prosodic as in other respects, something of a puzzle. It is generally taken as a rather late play. I have always myself been pretty sure, for reasons by no means wholly prosodic, that it is in part an early one. For instance, Shakespeare surely never drew Pompey *after* he had conceived his greater clowns, nor Lucio *after* he had drawn Benedick or even Sir Toby. But the blank verse is certainly mixed. None of it, perhaps, is of the earliest type, and some of it is, if not of the latest, of a late kind, as in the terror-struck eloquence of Claudio, and the Duke's great but ineffectual exhortation which precedes it. But in some places—especially in the opening passages, where the same Duke unfolds his exceedingly unstatesmanlike design, and that a little later when he reveals the rather ungenerous reason of it to Friar Thomas—there are all the marks of imperfect accomplishment. Abrupt ends occur side by side with divided middles; large redundancy with a stiff and sententious form of the individual line. Judging by prosody only, one would say that the play had been more than once begun, and more than once left off.

*As You Like  
It*

There is nothing of this kind about *As You Like It*, which is "of the Cabinet"; a capital example of the plays where the poet, whatever he wants to do prosodically, does it without the slightest difficulty, and with perfect success. It has, as befits a comedy, much prose; but as soon as it suits the author to drop into poetry, his blank verse is of the absolutely perfect type—so easy that it alternates with prose itself without any sense of jar, and yet perfectly modulated and rhythmed. There is not a very great deal of redundancy; it is not late enough for that. But the poet never hesitates at the

extra-syllable when he wants it, and never fails to want it to good purpose. If there is anywhere a falling back on the stopped type it is, perhaps, in Phoebe's

I would not be thy executioner ;

and there, as elsewhere, it is probably done on purpose.

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, on the other hand, <sup>*Taming of the Shrew.*</sup> which is certainly earlier, this type is paramount: not indeed of the stiffest, but much suppld and eased by the genius of the adapter-author, and found side by side with much jointed conversation-verse of a fairly accomplished kind.

*Twelfth Night* puts itself behind (that is to say, before) <sup>*Twelfth Night.*</sup> *As You Like It* by a somewhat greater predominance of the self-centred line, with the tendency (which seems to accompany that predominance, but which is, of course, a cause precedent rather than a result of it) towards constant dropping into rhyme. The very beautiful opening speech of the Duke is of this kind; yet it is imperatively necessary to observe that though there is somewhat too much of a tendency to turn the bullets out and nip off their junction singly, yet there is the fullest sense of the importance of varying them individually. The opening speeches of all Shakespeare's plays, except the very earliest, are almost invariably documents for this process of pause-variation. The "end-stopping," however, continues. It is notorious (the warning must again be repeated that it is not identical with end-punctuation) in Viola's prettiest sighings; in Olivia's stateliness and surrender alike; almost (though of course not quite) everywhere. At the same time, the very large amount of prose in the play curtails the opportunity of variation. And the same is the case with *Much Ado about Nothing*, <sup>*Much Ado.*</sup> which was, therefore, omitted from its proper place in the folio list. Except that *Twelfth Night* is the purest comedy and *Much Ado* very nearly tragic, these plays run indeed very much in a curriele prosodically, though the last named is a little the more mature. The principal blank-verse scene—that of the false accusation brought

against Hero in the church, and the council held after it—is very well illustrative of the later form of stopped verse, which has actually chipped itself free to a great extent from the mere shell of the earlier mould, but has not yet fully spread and freely used the wings of rhythmical undulation.<sup>1</sup> •

*The Winter's  
Tale.*

In *The Winter's Tale* we have blank verse of the very latest kind, which shows what it can do poetically in the famous and incomparable flower-speech of Perdita, but is on the whole (for Shakespeare was an experimenter to all but the last) rather more loose-girt than the medium of *The Tempest*. The writer not only indulges in the redundant syllable freely, but is particularly fond of making his coupling foot with the next line redundant<sup>2</sup>—a distinctly hazardous *tour de force* which, when attempted in the next generation, had much to do with the unbuttoning and unbuckling of blank verse altogether. So, too, he is also fond of fashioning this union<sup>3</sup> out of the conjunction “and”—a perfectly justifiable thing, except in the eyes or ears of those who, to this day, do not know what Stanyhurst knew three hundred years ago and more, the double quantity of that useful monosyllable and others; but, again, a dangerous one in unskilful hands. There is almost a redundance of redundances themselves: though one may trust the master one cannot trust his scholars not to forget that, when licences and exceptions go beyond a certain proportion, they lose their own justification as variety, and do not often acquire a fresh one as norm. There might be some reason for thinking *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare's first experiment in very

<sup>1</sup> To attempt to “place” this batch (with *The Merchant of Venice*) too exactly would be to commit the very fault which seems to me gravest in the usual commentator. *The Taming of the Shrew* ought to be the earliest; *As You Like It* must be the latest. *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado* should come between them, and are much of a piece in themselves and with each other. *The Merry Wives* stands alone. In *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure* early and late work are pretty clearly mingled.

<sup>2</sup> Leontes opening his free arms and weeping  
His welcome forth.

<sup>3</sup> . . . . . bold oxlips and  
The crown-imperial.

free redundance and overlapping combined: perhaps one made very much earlier than is usually thought, and kept back. Nor would this lack support in some non-prosodic aspects of the play.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the English "Histories" come into Meres's list, and have thus been discussed, as well as *Henry VI*, which is not there. *Henry V*.—resting, as it does, in part on old work, but in its most remarkable passages pure Shakespeare—is prosodically of a late, but not the very latest portion of the first stage. The single-verse mould is still, so to speak, the handiest that the author finds to pour his verse into; and he uses hardly any other in the set scenes of the First and Second Acts respecting the claim to the French crown and the Scroop conspiracy, the chorus-prologues, etc. But he passes into the fused form as before, when passion rather than pomp requires expression: as in the great soliloquy "Upon the King." Indeed, and for obvious reasons, Shakespeare's soliloquies, as they are among his most characteristic passages in other respects, are also of the first importance as prosodic "places." The bold picture

The other  
English  
Histories.  
*Henry V.*

<sup>1</sup> A longer specimen should, perhaps, be given, as the prosodic character of the play is peculiar:—

*Flo.* So call it: but it does fulfil my vow;  
I needs must think it honesty. Camillo,  
Not for Bohemia, nor the pomp that may  
Be thereat glean'd, for all the sun sees or  
The close earth wombs or the profound seas hide  
In unknown fathoms, will I break my oath;  
To this my fair beloved: therefore, I pray you,  
As you have ever been my father's honour'd friend,  
When he shall miss me,—as, in faith, I mean not  
To see him any more,—cast your good counsels  
Upon his passion: let myself and fortune  
Tug for the time to come. This you may know  
And so deliver, I am put to sea  
With her whom here I cannot hold on shore;  
And most opportune to our need I have  
A vessel rides fast by, but not prepared  
For this design. What course I mean to hold  
Shall nothing benefit your knowledge, nor  
Concern me the reporting.

This connects itself, rather remarkably, with the *Alps Well that Ends Well* passages cited above.

of the wretchedness of the English army by Grandpré—a thing resembling Victor Hugo's sketches with pen-ends—is half-and-half, as is also the hackneyed (if it could be hackneyed) address to “my cousin Westmoreland”; while in Burgundy's oration towards the close, the older model has the speech pretty much to itself. The Sonnet-Epilogue by the Chorus is noteworthy, and reminds us of the Sonnet-Prologues to the first two acts of *Romeo and Juliet*.

*Henry VIII.* As for *Henry VIII.*, the suspicions of at least collaboration therein are well known. A good deal of it *must* be Shakespeare's; the fall<sup>1</sup> of Wolsey and the death of Katharine are his in thought, in diction, and in prosody, as surely as if we had his autograph assertion of the fact, signed and witnessed by Fletcher and Ben Jonson, and the witnesses' signatures attested by a succession of endorsements for each generation to the present day. The Prologue has, indeed, no such ring, and this might have been added; but I do not see much else that fails to come up to the test. The whole play, however, is well known to be as full of hendecasyllables as one of Beaumont and Fletcher's own, and the overlapping even exceeds the redundancy. It is therefore impossible that it should not be late.

*Troilus and Cressida.* It is equally impossible, to pass to the classical plays, that *Troilus and Cressida*, in part at least, should not be early; and it must be remembered that the fact of Meres *not* mentioning a play is not final. But it belongs to the class in which, though the bullet-mould verse (as it has been called) is still predominant, there are already redundant endings, full pauses in the middle of lines, and even some direct enjambment between line and line. The piece also, as is well known, is full of the long set tirades—almost soliloquies—couched in very rhetorical, and even bombastic language, which are characteristic of the

<sup>1</sup> Even the “farewell,” which seems to some so eminently Fletcherian, is to me, after recent and copious re-readings of “B. and F.,” Fletcher *plus* some more potent spirit prosodically as otherwise, if it is Fletcher at all. The further discussion of this seems to me rather for editors of the two dramatists.



University Wits. And something of this comes in the modernest touch of the whole, the fine

Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,

of Ulysses, which may stand as a capital specimen of Shakespeare's blank verse just before it had attained its highest point of ease, without ceasing in the least to be well girt; while nearly as much may be said of Troilus's passionate repudiation of the identity of "Diomed's Cressida" with his own.

But the other Greek tragedy—to violate the folio order a little, here as elsewhere, for convenience' sake—though somewhat of a puzzle in many ways, is certainly of a later date than *Troilus* prosodically. The great prosodic note of *Timon* is that pause which shocked Guest<sup>1</sup> *Timon of Athens*. so irreconcilably, and which shows the final mastery of the whole secret—

. . . . . Dead  
Is noble Timon.

But this, though a special grace, a single flower or feather in the cap, is not in any discordance with the general prosodic character of the garment. From the first conversation of Painter and Poet to the funeral speech of Alcibiades, in which the tolling-bell pause above quoted occurs, the blank verse is of the thoroughly fused, matured, accomplished type, whether in jointed or in single speech. There is some but not much redundancy and enjambment, rather, it would seem, for convenience than deliberately used.

The three Roman plays, on the other hand, exhibit, probably because they were actually written in their proper chronological sequence,<sup>2</sup> a steady rise in prosodic mastery.

<sup>1</sup> *English Rhythms*, ed. Skeat, p. 153. "Opposed to every principle of accentual rhythm," he says, and perhaps he is right. But in that case the principles of accentual rhythm are obviously themselves opposed to the best English poetry.

<sup>2</sup> It is usual to regard *Julius Caesar* as the earliest by some seven years, but the evidence for its date is weak, and that for the late dates of the others weaker. On the other hand, the "cragginess" of *Coriolanus* in parts seems to me much more like a partial and probable break-up of the rock-wall of *Titus* than an experiment later than the smoothness of *Julius Caesar*.

*Coriolanus.*

In *Coriolanus* we are already far from the at least pseudo-Roman *Titus Andronicus*; but *Antony and Cleopatra* shows the blank verse of Shakespeare at its absolute zenith. "My name is Caius Marcius," "All places yield to him," and the great supplication-rebukes of Volumnia are so good that, considering them singly, a critic might say they could not be better. If a suspicion of want of ease, of absence of variety, of the declamatory occurs to us, it is only on the "rascally, comparative" principle, because the

*Julius Cæsar*

same writer has given us things more perfect. In *Julius Cæsar* variety itself, colour, flexibility, a dozen other qualities of attraction reinforce and complicate the Coriolanian dignity. The appeal of Marullus, partisan as it is, sets the note, or one of the numerous notes, of brilliant phrase married to concerted verse; and all the great passages, that literally every schoolboy knows, carry it on to the end. It might seem impossible to improve on

*Antony and Cleopatra.*

this; but I sincerely think that *Antony and Cleopatra* does show an improvement, and the last possible. The very opening speech, poetical enough, but, as was fitting, somewhat rhetorically poetical in substance, displays such cunning and science of pause and line-weighting that it is perhaps worth taking as the specimen thereof.<sup>1</sup> The poet plays on the ten lines as if they were the strings, separate but in harmony, of a ten-stringed lyre. There is hardly any prose—none, in fact, save in the one purely

<sup>1</sup> Nay, || but this dotage of our general's  
O'erflows the measure : || those his goodly eyes,  
That o'er the files | and musters of the war  
Have glowed like plated Mars, || now bend, | now turn,  
The office and devotion of their view  
Upon a tawny front : || his captain's heart,  
Which | in the scuffles of great fights | hath burst  
The buckles on his breast, || rene[a]g[u]es all temper,  
And is become | the bellows and the fan  
To cool a gipsy's lust.

(Here the double division marks indicate stronger, and the single lighter, pauses—not, as usually in the latter case, feet.) Attention may also be called to the set speeches of Octavius on different occasions. They are usually in very artful verse, strongly but variously broken by middle pauses; extremely effective, but with the *art* obviously emphasised to suit the character. Cf. especially the opening of III. vi. and the speeches to Octavia later.

comic passage,—but Shakespeare moulds his blank verse so impeccably that it never sounds unnatural in doing prose office. And when it does its own, it is indeed far above singing. Rhyme is great and good; no one who has done me the honour to read my first volume will doubt my allegiance to it. •Stanza is good; I may say the same of that. But no rhyme, no stanza, could have given us such a piece of pure and absolute poetry—that is to say, of language in metrical form—as

Peace! Peace!  
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,  
That sucks the nurse asleep?

The serpent of old Nile dies true to herself in the marvellous winding of this dying fall, which, while it is one of the greatest things in poetry, is an absolute pattern, a school-model and sampler of all but the whole secret of blank-verse fashion in pause, and cadence, and composition.

The first of the four great romantic tragedies, as it is one of the best known both to audiences and readers, so The Four  
Great  
Tragedies. it is one of the fullest of puzzles, not least prosodically, to critics. Nowhere has Shakespeare shown either the infinite resources of blank verse, or his own infinite command<sup>1</sup> of them, more completely and victoriously than in *Macbeth*. Not only do all the great single speeches—*Macbeth*. from Lady Macbeth's "The raven himself is hoarse" to that ineffable lament of her husband's for her, which some equally but differently ineffable persons regard as a callous put-by, and Siward's epitaph on his son—exhibit these two things as he only could exhibit or has exhibited them; but the jointed work of, say, the banquet scene, is not inferior. Still, mainly but not merely in the singular overture, there are passages of a far older and less accomplished type. In the curious bombast of the Sergeant, in Ross's first entrance, and (which, I think, has been less noticed) almost everywhere where the Thanes appear, we have, if not full, yet distinct, examples of the gasp-line, unmodulated and unsymphonised, the line weighted with

<sup>1</sup> For more on this command and these resources, see the general remarks which will follow this detailed comment.

fixed plummets or pledgets of lead, and not with coursing quicksilver. Half-a-dozen different conclusions might be drawn from these facts as to the origin, the date, and other things which concern a different method of inquiry from ours. It is enough for us to point out that they exist.

*Hamlet.* The "points in Hamlet's soul" are a byword; and the points which make *Hamlet* its author's capital play are scarcely less numerous, or less disputable. On one point concerning it, however, one may pronounce with some positiveness. The play, in its recognised form, is the work of a man for whom blank verse has no further secrets, who has every trick of it literally at his finger's ends; and who, moreover, is not yet under the influence of any mannerism which impairs the universality of his handling of the medium. Except that he is not so prodigal of the trisyllabic foot as he might be, and, as sometimes elsewhere, restricts it mainly to that interesting but tell-tale use at the cæsura on which we speak presently, there is hardly a single device that he does not employ copiously; and he employs them all with a very minimum of effort. In particular, he has now so completely got under his command the "jointed blank verse of conversation," that he really has no need of prose. He uses it, of course; *Hamlet* is hardly a greater place for anything Shakespearian than for the Shakespearian prose; but he need not have used it. The First Act has many passages where prose would do just as well as verse, but where the actual easy jointed verse does just as well as prose. He can still, when he chooses and thinks it appropriate, use the old staccato form.<sup>1</sup> The King's opening harangue in Act I. Sc. ii. is mainly in this, and it recurs at intervals up to Horatio's closing observations. But it is quite evidently not an obsession from which the writer with difficulty escapes, or an object at which he dutifully aims; it is something that he does because he likes and chooses to do it. Elsewhere, in Hamlet's great soliloquies, and indeed constantly, he chooses to do something quite different—he has the paragraph style as

<sup>1</sup> As, for instance, in the inset play with obvious reason.

completely at command as the staccato or the mosaic, and uses it at his pleasure, and for ours.

Even these things, however, do not show the terms of absolute and intimate familiarity on which the medium and the craftsman now are, so well as another. The variation of the pause, the breaking of the line, the use of the redundant syllable both at end and cæsura, and the trisyllabic foot improved from this latter, are all great things in the perfecting of the decasyllable. But, to paradox it a little, the greatest evidence of the triumph of this decasyllable is to be found in the lines which are not decasyllabic; in those which exceed and become Alexandrines, more or less regular, of which there are not a few; and in the fragments, falling short of decasyllabic length, of which there are many.<sup>1</sup> For these are evidently *not* like the excessive or defective lines in fifteenth and even mid-sixteenth-century verse—blundering attempts to be regular; but quite deliberate indulgences in excess or defect over or under a regular norm which is so pervading, so thoroughly marked, that it carries them off on its wings. In the whole First Act of *Hamlet* (I have just read it through for the purpose, scanning every line) there is not a single unmetrical verse or fragment of verse, nor any licence unsanctioned by the general principles of which we are watching the evolution in this treatise, except that (certainly sanctionable by them) of using lines longer or shorter than the norm when the poet chooses to do so. To read *Hamlet*, and think of *Titus Andronicus* or *Love's Labour's Lost*, is a most quaint and pleasing experience; to read *Hamlet* and then one of Marlowe's plays, remembering that the poets were of the same age, that they were not so very unequally matched in quality, whatever may be the case with quantity, of genius, and that scarcely more than fifteen years can by any possibility have elapsed between the pieces, may make one simply marvel.

<sup>1</sup> This is a point of importance, and may be misunderstood by those who have not accustomed themselves to note the difference between poetical and prosodic rhythm. What I mean is that the incomplete lines, of which there are many, even in I. i., *all scan regularly as far as they go*, like those found here and there in Virgil,

*King Lear*

There are some peculiarities in the blank verse of *King Lear*. Instead of the set speeches in the earlier part of the play showing—as we have seen is sometimes the case, even in pieces pretty late in date and pretty far advanced in accomplishment—a tendency towards the stiffened model, the decasyllables of *Lear's ill-judged and ill-fated bid for his daughters' hypocrisy* are of the very finest type. They run into each other less than the probably still later model of *The Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*; but they are even fuller of trisyllabic feet, and the lines extend not merely to the Alexandrine but to the fourteener.<sup>1</sup> The speeches, evidently conned beforehand, of Goneril and Regan, lack this luxuriance, and Lear's rage at Cordelia's fractiousness (one fears it must be called so, and it supplies in her case the ἀμαρτία of the play) acts as a kind of styptic to it. But it recurs in him and in others, though not in all, and not always in those who use it. It is the properest of all possible media for the splendid central scenes, and especially for that more than Æschylean opening which the late Professor Bain,<sup>2</sup> though acknowledging it to be one of the loftiest flights of Shakespeare's sublimity, thought "wanting in dignity," "improperly arranged" ("hurricane," it seems, ought to have preceded "cataract"), "powerful but extravagant," "containing epithets not specially applicable," and "barely redeemed from feebleness." Well as it is known, we must give this so loftily feeble piece—

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!  
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout  
 Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!  
 You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,  
 Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,  
 Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,  
 Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!  
 Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once,  
 That make ingrateful man!

Here the monosyllabic feet in "rage" and "blow," the trisyllabic (nearly if not quite tribrachs) at "sulphurous

<sup>1</sup> May be prevented now. The princes, France and Burgundy:

<sup>2</sup> *Rhetoric and Composition*, i, 105.

and," and "vaunt cou|riers to" | and "rotun|dity o' | the world"—are the *clous* or the hinges of the metrical composition. It is not for nothing that the equally famous description of the cliff is in regular, cunningly jointed, but swiftly moving verse, a sort of under-the-breath of apprehension, as if boisterous speaking might bring danger; nor that the broken verse (really "broken") of Lear's invective on women resolves itself at last into sheer prose; nor that Edmund supplies a hardly less perfect example in little than Cleopatra's, with—

Thou hast spoken right: 'tis true .  
 The wheel has come full circle: I am here ;

nor that Lear's last moan, before his agony chokes him, is represented by the incomparable audacity and the more incomparable success of the five-times-repeated trochee "Never!" Once more there is no spirit from the infinite deep of prosodic possibility that the poet cannot call, and none that dare disobey the calling.

The agony in *Othello* is not finally abated, because *Othello*. Desdemona is a more entirely innocent victim than Cordelia, and the ἀμαρτία of the Moor is far more pardonable than that of Lear. But the matter of the play is much more varied; and whereas, in *Lear*, the actual tragedy begins almost at once, and is hardly medicable, the author of *Much Ado about Nothing* would not have found it a very difficult matter to turn *Othello* into a tragi-comedy, though the present phase of dramatic taste would of course have been shocked at this. Therefore the play requires greater variety of medium also, and has it. At this time, moreover, Shakespeare was evidently expert in, and fond of, the very freest and at the same time the very purest form of his verse. Iago is, in fact, the great master of it. Few people have ever denied "mine ancient" brains, and some have thought that, if he had not been such a villain, he might have been a very good fellow. He is certainly both good and great at verse. His two chief opening speeches are actually the text and *locus* for this kind of it, as well as for demonstrating the extraordinary and hardly

comprehensible error of those who will not have "feet" in Shakespearian, or in any, scansion. The excursions outwards and the withdrawals inward from the norm are almost infinite; but they are animated and regulated by the presence of that norm in foot and verse alike. The extreme freedom of the type is appropriately modified in the interview with Brabantio, and in what we may call the "Court-of-Honour" scene, but it subsists to some extent throughout. Some of the characters—Montano and the Two Gentlemen, for instance—make a little return to the "bumbasted out" blank verse; while Iago in his soliloquies is rather more regular than *Hamlet*, precisely because he is less natural. But Desdemona's perfect naturalness makes her almost as excursive as her great enemy in his virtuoso moods. And all—Iago himself in the fiend's aside "not poppy nor mandragora," Othello in his farewell to peace of mind, Desdemona in her sorrow at his change, and still more and most of all the Moor in his agony of remorse—can employ the sedater, but perfectly motioned and well-breathed model to perfection. Yet in that other of the *apices* of the impregnable and only from afar beholdable places of poetry with which the play closes, there is a sort of return to the elastic verse. Othello hurries over or lengthens out—

Nor set down aught | in malice : | then must you speak,  
and

Richer | than all | his tribe ; | of one | whose sub|dued eyes.

But there is no irregular throb in the steady pulse and purpose of the period from "Set you down this," to "And smote him"; though the sob of the trisyllable may return in the final

I kissed | thee ere | I killed | thee : no way | but this.

*Cymbeline.* *Cymbeline*—a play of which more foolish people have said more foolish things<sup>1</sup> perhaps than even of any other

<sup>1</sup> I think the palm is perhaps due to a mysterious person at Calcutta who, as I learn from Mr. Bertram Dobell's *Catalogue of Privately Printed Books*, requested to be informed, in the year 1841, "What can be more drivelling than the 'Dirge on Fidele'—a subject of which Collins has shown the poetical



play of Shakespeare (if that be possible)—does not tax the instrument to the superhuman extent of *Othello*. And the late type of verse—rather loose than merely free—which it shares with some others, suits well enough, and breaks into prose quite naturally and easily when the poet feels inclined for even more of “dressing-gown-and-slippers” liberty. But he never forgets civility; and is always duly garbed for a ceremonious occasion. Iachimo resembles his spiritual and perhaps natural clansman—certainly compatriot—Iago, in being able to run the gamut of blank verse perfectly; Imogen’s is as gracious as her nature; the Queen’s has a treacherous stateliness; the most orderly pattern is perhaps found in the scene with the banished family; the most powerful in that which follows between Imogen and Pisanio; while the sweetest is Guiderius’ companion flower-piece to Perdita’s in the play which is itself the pendant to *Cymbeline* prosodically. But the most accomplished is Iachimo’s at the accomplishment of his treason; and this is not of the very loosest model.

Nor shall we omit *Pericles*, of the authorship of which *Pericles*. (at least as far as concerns the greater part of it) I have never had the slightest doubt. But it was evidently a derelict in some way. Not merely the extremely *décousu* character of the plot, and the absence of any distinct character-drawing, but the importance and peculiarity of the chorus, show earliness; and so does the blank verse, though this is not exactly of the earliest. The first

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capabilities?” Now certainly Collins, at his best, is a poet whom it is not absurd to mention in the same sentence with Shakespeare, different though the magnitude of their stars may be. But the “drivel” of

Fear no more the heat o’ the sun  
Nor the furious winter’s rages,

and the “poetry” of

To fair Fidele’s grassy tomb  
Soft maids and village hinds shall come

(which is hardly at the best eighteenth century level in its gradus epithets and mawkish sweetness), is a very comfortable comparison. It would be interesting to know the gentleman’s name, and whether he left a family. His spiritual descendants are certainly still with us.

speeches, especially the soliloquies, of Pericles himself are distinctly but not exclusively stopped; and there is plenty of redundancy in them. So also is it with Cleon's in the famine. But when the storm comes, the Prince, both in his opening and in the beautiful

A terrible childbed hast thou had, my dear,

adopts a very much freer model—indeed, one almost as free as that of the great Quadrilateral. There is, however, little new for us here, though we must return to the important octosyllables.

General  
considerations

In the foregoing survey of Shakespeare's plays I have given some general idea of the way in which the operation of the various agencies shows itself, with (as far as possible) the order of their succession. Really, though chronological illustration is interesting and corroborative, it is in a way superfluous, because we can see without it how the employment of them would grow on the hands of such an artist. Of *deliberate* experimenting with any or all of them there would probably not be very much; the man who wrote "Rebellion lay in his way, and he found it," has dispensed us from any such vain imagination. These things lay in *his* way; and he found them, and made the most of them. That "most" also has been illustrated freely. But it is perhaps desirable to give it an account of something the same kind as that which has been given to the style which was its matrix and crude form.

The completed Shakespearian blank verse, as we see it maturing in the later early, and middle plays, and matured in the four great tragedies and in *Antony and Cleopatra*, preserves the iambic decasyllable as norm inviolably; never instals any other, and makes everything that it admits hold of that. But the strict minimum is infinitely varied, and, even when kept, is entirely stripped of its monotonous and stable character, and made to understand that it must be Protean in itself, and ready to enter into infinite combinations with its neighbours. The great agency in this, beyond all doubt, is the

manipulation of the pause. Not that Shakespeare is, as some have vainly thought, to be scanned by "staves"—staves "knapped," as the good old Biblical word has it, almost as bluntly as the old alliterative verses themselves. The futility of this notion is shown, in a way which makes it wonderful that it should ever have been entertained by anybody, in the fact that a very large proportion of Shakespeare's lines have no real pause at all, are "staves" of themselves, and hardly even that, so unbroken is the rhythmical current of the adjacent lines from and into them. This doing away with middle- and end-pause alike is at least as important as the variation of the middle, and, in fact, is but an extension of it.

The normal blank-verse line of the origins, as Shakespeare took it over from Surrey, Sackville, and even the Wits, was a strict "decasyllabon" of five iambs, with a cæsure somewhat carefully observed about the middle, and self-inclosed in a manner not easy to make plain by individual examples, or by any process of overt analysis, but sensible to any ear of the slightest delicacy when a few specimens have been read. It sometimes admitted a sort of redundance or "weak ending," not merely in words which were then really monosyllables, like "heaven," but in those which were trochaic-tipped with a very short final syllable, like "glory." This licence, however, did not in the least affect its general structure. It by no means always concluded with even a comma (though it mostly did do so); but the grammatical running on did not in the least interfere with the metrical snapping off. It tolerated pretty strong stops in the middle of the line, but these also (so much stronger was the obsession of line-integrity) did not interfere with the sunk ditch of the line-end. Thus, even when, as in the great passages of Peele and Marlowe, the unity of thought and imagination made the paragraph quite *poetically* distinct, this paragraph was never a real verse-period of the larger kind; there was no composition in the purely rhythmical and metrical conception of the verse. To put the thing extremely—extravagantly, some would say—the delivery

of this paragraph to a person who did not understand the language would have conveyed to him the idea of some dozen or sixteen verses, individually perhaps melodious, but not *regimented*, not worked into any kind of *symphony*. This sort of blank verse we find in all the writers named above exclusively, with the exceptions (and others, of course), also noted above, in Marlowe and his mates, when the rough strife of poetry bursts its way through the iron gates of metre. We find it also in *Titus Andronicus*, in the *Comedy of Errors*, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, in the early rehandled "Histories," and elsewhere in Shakespeare himself.

But, as partly noted, there are certain features even in this rigid and early model which are at war with the self-contained single line and the merely cumulative batch of lines. They may be kept under as long as the poet's chief aim is to *secure* his decasyllabon, to keep it from doggerel on the one hand, and, on the other, to make it independent of the warning bell of rhyme at the end. But when practice, in himself to speak and in his readers to hear, has made the blank decasyllabic effect familiar—when it need not be strictly uniform in order to obtain recognition—these features assert themselves. The first of these probably, and the most insidious, but also the most revolutionary, is the redundant syllable. It is of an ancient house; we had ourselves fifteeners before we had fourteeners, and in all prosodies from Greek downwards there has been a tendency to regard the last place in a line as a place of licence and liberty. It is curiously unassuming; in words (to keep the same examples) not merely like "heaven," but like "glory," it is a sort of "breath" only, something that you do not count, but just smuggle in with its companion. Yet, as we shall see presently, it is a very Trojan Horse in reality. Then there is the stop, full or other, in the middle of the line. This also is innocent-seeming. What is it but a mere grammatical emphasising of the cæsura itself, recognised of Gascoigne and all good people long before the first of the Wits had trodden or supplied the stage? Next

probably—but it need hardly be said that I stand not upon the order—comes the intermixture of rhyme, a thing which the greatest blank verse will frown upon, but which is so likely as a relapse, so convenient as a “cue-tip,” so pleasant to the as yet unaccustomed ear of the groundlings; and which, be it remembered, almost necessitates a sort of junction between two lines, though it may favour the closing of the couplets. All these are things apparently compatible—certainly found—with the stiffest of the drumming decasyllabons, yet secret solvents of their stiffness.

Other things, still not ostensibly revolutionary, next suggest themselves. We have seen in the last volume, that mediæval poets, whether through inexpertness or by experiment, and fifteenth-century poets through clumsiness, largely curtailed or extended the normal length of the line; that there are Alexandrines even in Chaucer, while—a point to which the Renaissance was likely to pay more attention—there are undoubtedly incomplete lines in Virgil. Why not avail oneself of these licences? Even Marlowe had done so now and then. Why not? But if you do, your sacred integer of ten syllables is rudely touched. Once more, again, you have recognised, and had formally recognised for you,<sup>1</sup> the duty of making a sort of fold or crease in each verse at the fourth, fifth, or neighbouring syllable. It is inconvenient, as well as monotonous always to do it at the same place; yet when you begin to vary that place, is not the structure of the line troubled, though beneficently so? And is there not somehow a kind of rhythmic conspiracy in the successive lines where you vary it? Then, too, there comes the power of words. Important or beautiful words, adjusted, spaced, accumulated, give brilliancy, splendour, weight to the line. But the line is so short. Why cut the necklace into lengths? Why not make the stars constellations?

And, lastly, there is the trisyllabic foot.

<sup>1</sup> On this and other references of the kind see the chapter on “Prosodists” in this Book.

I trust I may repeat (after the not of course unanimous but fairly general acknowledgment of critics, that the preceding volume has made something of a case for it) that the trisyllabic foot is ubiquitous in English verse from 1200 to 1500, and that nothing but the reaction from the anarchy of doggerel brought about later, the partial and only partial reprobation thereof. But there is no need to have recourse to this, though from the historical point of view it cannot be omitted. In blank verse, and especially in dramatic blank verse—when once the practitioner has got rid of his fear of losing the guide-rope, if he step out of the strict iamb—it *must*, in English, appear. It does appear; and with it disappears the mere rub-a-dub of the decasyllabon.

The pause      In arranging the pause—at any syllable from first to ninth, and at no syllable at all, not even tenth—he is helped infinitely by that distribution of the weight of words, rather after the fashion of quicksilver, in a reed than of leaden bracelets fastened at intervals round a stick, which has been more than once referred to. Nobody has approached Shakespeare—Tennyson has perhaps come nearest, for Milton's verse is too uniformly stately for comparison—in this mastery of poetical conjuring with word and line, a mastery of which he had more than a glimpse as early as *Romeo and Juliet*, and of which he gave the final and perfect display in *The Tempest*. The lines rise, fall, sweep, wave, dart straight forward, are arrested in mid-air, insinuate themselves in serpentine fashion as if in sword-play against an invisible adversary.

But these effects of weight, lightness, pungency, arresting power, and so forth, are at least partly caused—are certainly assisted immensely—by two other things, the redundant ending and the trisyllabic foot. The first chiefly gives variety; the second variety *and* flexibility as nothing else could do; while variety again is lent by the shortened fragment-verses and the elongated Alexandrines and fourteeners, or by verses with several trisyllabic feet in them. How these various devices may be made to subserve particular effects of meaning, shades of passion,

and the like, need not be much dwelt on. This is a form of prosodic study which has always commended itself to the multitude as much as, perhaps almost more than, it should. But as to the way in which the use of the trisyllabic foot grew, I have a theory which is doubtless not new but about which I have not seen much written.

It has been observed before, that, according to the principles of this book, "extra-metrical" syllables, anywhere but at the end or middle of the verse, are a confession, as the case may be, of impotence on the part of the poet if they exist, of the critic, if they are supposed to exist. And no great admiration has been hinted of the extra-metrical syllable at the middle in any case. I believe, however, that at this critical moment in the history of blank verse and, through the influence of this on rhyme, in the history of English poetry generally, the mistake or laches of indulging in this internal excrescence brought about a great good. A large, a very large, number of lines could be pointed out where such a syllable is almost undoubtedly intended by the poet (supposing he thought about it at all) as a licence of the kind, and not to be carried on to the other half of the line. As such, the effect is almost always ugly; it can only be admired by those persons (with whom the present writer most heartily differs, though he has been confused with them) who think that an irregularity *must* be an improvement, that a mole *must* be a beauty, that discord *must* be harmonious. But such an ear as Shakespeare's could not fail to perceive that this ugliness could be turned into a beauty by simply effecting the connection, and fusing the derelict syllable with the following iamb to make an harmonious anapæst.<sup>1</sup> And this, I have myself not the slightest doubt, was, in his and other cases, the actual genesis (whether consciously and deliberately carried out does not, once more, in the least matter) of the revived trisyllabic foot which Gascoigne had bewailed as dead. And so the discord *was* made harmonious; the mole *did*

The trisyllabic  
foot and its  
revival.

<sup>1</sup> Those who like amphibrachs may, of course, join it to the preceding, not the following, iamb. To my ear this arrangement is generally inferior.

become a beauty ; and the irregularity *was* the foundation of the larger and nobler Rule. The process, in fact, is one of the best examples of that operation of growth and life to which the people who say that the ballad writers never thought about contending for the liberty of this very trisyllabic foot itself, seem insensible. I do not know whether the wind thinks about blowing or the flower about growing, but I know that they blow and grow.

The redundant  
syllable.

The use at the end of the syllable, redundant or extra-metrical—if we must have the word, though to me extra-metre is no metre—has a different history. At the middle it is very rarely a beauty ; perhaps never, unless it can be “carried over” as just described. At the end it is often beautiful ; and, whether beauty or not, is almost inevitable now and then, and most useful constantly. Further, it is a most powerful and important instrument of variation—a natural link or remedy against line-isolation, far-descended as has been said, and of other excellent differences. But it is something of a Delilah—who was herself apparently of a good Philistine family, and is known to have had exceptional attractions as a person. Indeed, the parable or parallel works out with remarkable exactness ; for it is a very considerable time before Delilah takes away Samson’s strength, and the means whereby she does so are mysterious. It can hardly be said (though one may feel a vague sense of danger) that in Shakespeare’s own probably latest plays, where he indulges himself with the redundant line, Samson is anything but Samson still. There are passages on passages in Beaumont and Fletcher themselves—notably that magnificent piece in *The False One*, which is one of the purplest patches in the coat of Elizabethan drama—where the hendecasyllable has it nearly all its own way, with no harm and much good. But Delilah is still Delilah ; and she is too much for Samson—the verse if not the verse-smith—at last.

Enjambment.

She takes indeed two forms : for much the same as has been said of the redundant syllable may be said of enjambment or overlapping. This, indeed, is rather the



special Delilah of the couplet than of blank verse, but each kind has to be very wary when it visits the vale of Sorek in this manner also. Opportunity of delight and occasion for display of power as it is to the verse that keeps itself strong and wide awake, overlapping is a place of slipping, and may be a pit of destruction, to the loose-girt and careless versifier. And it has, in common with redundancy and with the use of trisyllabic feet, the special danger that it is perfectly easy to do it badly. Anybody, as soon as these devices are once recognised, can practise them after a fashion, and everybody proceeds to do so: whence come things for tears.

But the offence is his by whom the offence cometh; and Shakespeare in his complete work showed that there was no necessity of offence at all, while there was the possibility (and in his case the accomplishment) of infinite beauty. Foolish things have, no doubt, been said—in fact they are not unfrequently said at the present moment—as to the superiority of blank verse to rhyme; and we shall have to deal with them, and with those from Milton downwards who have been and are guilty of them, as they occur. At present it is sufficient to point out, first, that the misvaluation is merely a case of the common inability to like two good things without putting them into unjust balances and weighing them against each other with unstamped weights. Secondly, that, for this purpose and that, blank verse is *not* superior to rhyme but demonstrably inferior. It will not do—at least it has not done—for strict lyric, as the moderate success even of Campion or Collins, and the failure of almost everybody else, have well shown. It is a great question whether it is not a very dangerous medium even for long narrative poems. But for *short* narratives: for short reflective, descriptive, didactic, and other pieces of various kinds: and for every kind of drama, or even partially dramatic matter, it is, in English, the predestined medium, hammered out at first by a full generation and more of partly unsuccessful, never more than partly successful, pioneers and journeymen, chipped into perfect

The morphology and biology of blank verse.

form by the master Shakespeare, in probably not half a generation longer. Its extraordinary and unique success in English—for German blank verse, good as it can be, is far inferior, especially in variety and music; and I know no thirdsmen that deserves to rank—is probably due to the fact that our language, though perhaps singly accented, is not singly emphasised; that it provides a large number of sufficient resting-places for the voice, but does not require (or, except as an exception, allow) long dwelling on any. The way in which not merely the French but almost all continental nations hurry over half-a-dozen or a dozen syllables, and then plunge on the succeeding one with a volley of exploding and shrapnel-like emphasis, utterly ruins blank verse, whether as articulately delivered, or as read with that inarticulate but exactly proportioned following of actual delivery which is necessary for prosodic appreciation. It is one of the worst faults of the stress- or accent- or beat-system, as opposed to the foot, that it vulgarises and impoverishes this great metre, where the unstressed syllables are no less important than the stressed. It is essential to blank verse that no part of it should be killed, and none brought into convulsive and galvanic activity: otherwise the delicate and complicated or simple and yet substantial melody is jarred and jangled out of all tune and time. Yet what infinite variety of time and tune can be got out of it—not by “getting up stairs” on the instrument, and flinging oneself down again, but by evoking the infinite variety of its tones Shakespeare, Milton, Thomson, Shelley, Tennyson, Browning, have shown us. But the greatest of these, and the first, and the master of all the rest in even the details and peculiarities in which each is himself a master, is Shakespeare.

*The Poems.*

It would be a pity not to pursue this mastery, without a break, into the other and minor departments in which it is shown, even though we may have to recur to the subject hereafter. It is, in fact, all the more important and almost necessary to do so, in that the earliest documents, certainly dated, of Shakespeare's prosodic

practice that we have, are non-dramatic. We may date by guesswork any existing dramatic passages of the earlier blank-verse type, such as those which excited Greene's spleen certainly, and his envy not improbably, as much before 1593 as we like; but we *know* nothing dramatic of Shakespeare's before that time, and hardly anything for five years after it. *Venus and Adonis*, on the other hand, and *Lucrece* are assured facts of that year, 1593, and its successor. Now at the date of the earlier *The Faerie Queene* was but three years old, and *The Shepherd's Kalendar* itself but thirteen; while the great sonnet-outburst was only beginning, and Drayton, the chief non-dramatic poet of Shakespeare's exact generation, had published nothing previously but the *Harmony of the Church*.

To say that the sixains of *Venus and Adonis* and the rhyme-royal of *Lucrece* are perfect, would be mere "blind affection," as Ben Jonson says. They are not; and they would be much less interesting if they were. For in that case the experienced and unsatisfactory critic would expect with a rueful certainty, what has happened in so many other cases of mocking-birds, who can learn anything but do nothing. The individual verses of the *Venus* have the mark which we have seen so often before, and which is an infallible symptom of the desire at any cost, however unconsciously, to get rid of the abominable looseness of preceding generations—the mark of excessive self-completion, of what we have called the bullet-mould. Just as in the blanks, this effect is independent of mere punctuation at the verse end; you will find it in such a line as—

The studded bridle on a ragged bough

where there is no stop at all, not so much as a comma. And in the same way the final couplet is apt to be too much isolated from the quatrain—a thing which, as has been also pointed out, was a valuable school for the continuous stopped couplet itself, but which is not always a beauty in the stanza. But here, also, the dæmonic

element in Shakespeare shows itself, and here, fortunately, we can say that it shows itself at once. While he is musing over the supposed requirements of the metre the fire kindles, and the metre itself is transposed, transformed, transfused, under his hand. Spenser had begun the *Kalendar* with this very stave thirteen years before, and had done nobly with it. But though perhaps the stanza "Thou barren, etc.," formerly quoted, has a certain marmoreal dignity which the more passionate and human strains of the *Venus* do not invite, the advance in this direction of passionate humanity represented by prosodic movement is very great. It is no wonder that musicians should have seen the extraordinarily lyrical movement of "Bid me discourse," or that painters and naturalists should have acknowledged the astonishing feats of the episode of the horse. But the evidences of prosodic adequacy are omniform and omnipresent. In the single and early line—

Ten kisses short as one, one long as twenty,

there is, when we consider the stage both of the poetry and of the poet, an almost uncanny mastery in the location of the pause, the distribution of the words of the hemistich, and the adoption of the redundant syllable. So with the trisyllabic centre of

Leading him *prisoner* in a red rose chain,

and the fingering of the vowels and of the suggested trochees in

Her two blue | windows | faintly | she upheaveth.

Rhyme-royal is a far finer measure than the sixain; but, as we have noted already, it seems to be rather a capricious mistress, and not to reward all its lovers equally. Certainly Shakespeare does not get out of it, in proportion to its possibilities, quite the effect which, at a yet earlier stage, he produces with the other. Indeed, *Lucrece*, one might not be unjustified in the suspicion that *Lucrece*, though the later published, was the earlier written of the two. There are more of the mere tricks, rhetorical rather

than poetical, of *epanaphora* and the like: the separate model of the lines is more constantly maintained; and the tetremimeral cæsura, which, as we can guess from Gascoigne's warning, was a sort of fetich with rhyme-royal writers, imposes its monotonous clutch too often. It is more like a school-exercise than anything else of Shakespeare's, though it is the exercise of a very remarkable schoolboy indeed. Besides, the perfection to which rhyme-royal had been brought already, and by others, at once made the exercise easy, and deprives it of interest. It was probably the sense that, after Chaucer and Sackville, little more was to be done with it that made Spenser reject it for his great work, and even Shakespeare could not, or at least did not, prove him wrong.

Very different is it with the *Sonnets*. We are, of *The Sonnets*. course, free here from the self-sought obsessions in respect of subject or object which beset so many students of these marvellous compositions. It is enough for us that they exist, and that Meres's reference shows that at any rate some of them existed at a pretty early period of Shakespeare's career; while the general—not of course quite universal—equality of the model makes it very unnecessary to disturb ourselves with the futile inquiry whether any, and if so which, of them were not or might not have been handed about among his private friends *before* 1598. Here the poet has a medium which is absolutely congenial to him, and with which, as with blank verse, he can do anything he likes. With his usual sagacity he chooses the English form, and prefers its extremest variety—that of the three quatrains and couplet, without any interlacing rhyme. Nevertheless he gives the full sonnet-*effect*—not merely by the distribution (which he does not always observe, though he often does) of octave and sestet *subject*, but very mainly by that same extraordinary symphonising of the prosodic effects of individual and batched verses, which was his secret in blank verse itself. If it seem surprising that so difficult and subtle a medium should be mastered so early, let it be remembered that the single-line mould, properly used,

is by no means unsuitable to the sonnet, the effect of which is definitely cumulative. We have no certain or even probable sonnets of Marlowe's, for the three coarse but fairly vigorous ones by "Ignoto," usually printed with his works, are very unlikely to be his. But if he had written any he would not have had to alter his mode of line much in itself. He would, however, have had to adjust it relatively, as he seldom did, and as Shakespeare began to do from the first, by weighting it variously, by applying what we have called the "quicksilver" touch.

It is by this combined cumulative and diversifying effect, this beating up against the wind as it were,<sup>1</sup> that the ordinary and extraordinary "tower" of these sonnets is produced; and this tower is to some readers their great and inexhaustible charm. No matter what the subject is, the "man right fair" or "the woman coloured ill," the incidents of daily joy and chagrin, or those illimitable meditations on life and love and thought at large which eternise the more ephemeral things,—the process, prosodic and poetic, is more or less the same, though carefully kept from monotony. In the very first lines there is the spread and beating of the wing; the flight rises till the end of the *douzain*, when it stoops or sinks quietly to the close in the couplet. The intermediate devices by which this effect is produced are, as always with Shakespeare, hard to particularise. Here, as in the kindred region of pure style, he has so little mannerism, that it is easier to apprehend than to analyse his manner. It may be a coincidence, or it may not, that in a very large proportion of the openings what we may call a bastard *cæsura*, or ending of a word without much metrical scission at the third syllable, precedes a strictly metrical one at the fourth.<sup>2</sup> Another point is that, throughout, full stops or

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, like a sensible man as he was, did not care a rush about the consecutiveness of his own metaphors; indeed it is doubtful whether any sensible man, except Théophile Gautier, ever did.

<sup>2</sup> In other words the fourth half-foot is constantly monosyllabic. "Look in thy glass" (iii.) is the first, and there are a dozen others in the first two dozen sonnets.

their equivalents in mid-line are extremely rare, and even at the end not common, till the twelfth, so that the run of the whole is uninterrupted, though its rhythm is constantly diversified. Redundant syllables are very rare, except where, as in lxxxvii., they are accumulated with evident purpose. The trisyllabic foot, though used with wonderful effect sometimes, is used very sparingly. On the whole Shakespeare seems here to have had for his object, or at any rate to have achieved as his effect, the varying of the line with as little as possible breach or ruffling of it. He allows himself a flash or blaze of summer lightning now and then, but no fussing with continual cracklers. All the prosodic handling is subdued to give that steady passionate musing—that “emotion recollected in tranquillity”—which is characteristic of the best sonnets, and of his more than almost of any others. Of mere “sports,” such as the octosyllabic cxlv., it is hardly necessary to speak.

There remain to be discussed the miscellaneous metres *Miscellaneous metres.* in the Plays themselves, and the Songs. Of the former not very much need be said. The fourteeners, the doggerel, the stanzas, the octosyllables, and the rhymed couplets are quite clearly makeshifts and stopgaps, dictated not (with a possible exception in the last case) by the poet's sense that they make good dramatic media, but at the most by an experimentalising tendency, at the least by mere noviceship and the following of others. It is, however, really curious how the faculty of turning everything touched more or less to gold, appears here also. Into the doggerel and the fourteeners, especially in *Love's Labour's Lost*, as well as into the short stanza-verse of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare infuses an inimitable touch of parody which had not been seen in English prosodic handling since *Sir Thopas*; and like Chaucer he takes care to make his parody particularly smooth and correct in its very absurdity. The octosyllables *The octo-syllable.* (mostly shortened to trochaic heptasyllables, and so patterning that delightful variation for the future) of the close of the *Dream*, of the Epilogue of *The Tempest*, of

*Decasyllabic  
couplets.*

the scrolls in *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*, of the Gower Prologues (some of them among the most Shakespearian things in the play), in *Pericles*, show an absolute command of this old and charming measure, so easy in appearance, so difficult to preserve from sing-song and prose in reality. The stanza-speeches of the early and middle-early plays are too few and too unimportant to require much attention. But the decasyllabic couplets are in a somewhat different position, considering the abiding importance of that vehicle in English. This importance is, of course, somewhat diminished by the fact that they are almost entirely, either as has been said, makeshifts, or else dictated by the well-known cue-purpose—the desire to wind up a scene, or part of a scene, with a ring-beat agreeable to the audience and convenient to the actors. It will, however, be at once evident that this latter object of itself prescribes a certain decision and precision in the sound, as well as in the sense of the distichs, and so makes them inevitable patterns and stimulants in the cultivation of the stopped and epigrammatic form. Many of the most emphatic and clearest-ringing passages in Shakespeare—for instance, Iago's mocking praise of women and his half-triumphant, half-apprehensive anticipation of the night of murder—take this form. In the early and middle-early plays, as we have seen, and sometimes later for an object (as in the cases just mentioned), not merely end-couplets but whole passages fall into rhyme; but the couplet is most commonly<sup>1</sup> of the stopped form—which indeed the poet had practised in his two earliest positively known works, both of them non-dramatic, as *code* to the sixain and the rhyme-royal. When, on the other hand, he wanted to overlap, his growing sense of the possibilities of blank verse made him independent of the couplet, or positively disinclined to it. Thus, in the battle which we are shortly to witness, his powerful influence and example is, by a rather quaint accident, on the side of the less Romantic form as against the more Romantic.

<sup>1</sup> Not, of course, always.



If good wine needs no bush, pure nectar needs it still The Songs.  
less ; and who shall praise Shakespeare's songs ? Yet they touch us too nearly to be entirely passed over. It is at least remarkable that, except Peele in a few places, and Lyly (with whom he has a connection—never, of course, missed, but perhaps, on the whole, rather under- than over-valued), Shakespeare's predecessors do not seem to have thoroughly appreciated the charm of the lyric element, which he and his successors were to make a feature of the Elizabethan drama, and one of the loveliest. This is all the more remarkable in that two of them, Lodge and Greene, are prodigal of beautiful songs in their prose work. Marlowe has no songs, nor, I think, has Kyd any worth speaking of. Even Peele, himself a perfect master of them, does not use them in every play.

But Shakespeare employs the lyre, and shows his skill in it, from the very first—"Who is Sylvia?" in *The Two Gentlemen*, and "When daisies pied" in *Love's Labour's Lost*—to Ariel's ineffable music at the very last. We shall deal with the whole subject of this song-cycle presently, but it is proper and important to observe here that Shakespeare's absolute prosodic mastery is hardly in any division more conspicuous. We saw, in dealing with the pre-Shakespearian Miscellanies, that the endeavour to match words to music had already communicated a great apparent variety to measure ; but that prosodic development had not quite kept pace with musical adaptation. If, on the other hand, we turn to the now well-known music-books, we shall find that the more exquisite word-masters—Campion, "those about Jones," and others—do not so very often (though, of course, they do sometimes) affect very zig-zaggy formulas. But Shakespeare, from first to last, seems to have had entirely at his command the "wood notes wild" that Milton (a skilled musician, remember, as well as, which is a very different thing, a prosodist, inferior to hardly anybody but Shakespeare himself) recognised in him. I suppose it is probable, though I do not think it at all certain, that he may have

always written to existing airs,<sup>1</sup> but, unless I mistake, these airs do not exist in at least the great majority of cases. Nor are the well-known modern settings (with a few exceptions, such as the well-known "Under the greenwood tree") by any means self-imposing or authoritative to a carefully trained prosodic ear. On the other hand, to such an ear, there is hardly one of these songs that does not carry its own prosodic music with it, infallibly and exquisitely married. Here Shakespeare indeed "fulfils all numbers." There is no better text for that iambic-trochaic substitution, with which the accent people make such wild work, than Ariel's first and greatest song. Nobody had yet used a trisyllabic foot, which, in its connection with hitherto unbroken trochees, may be allowed to be dactylic, as in the "Merrily, merrily" of his last. But these, it may be said, are absolute masterpieces—the last achievement of many a tentative. Next door, so to speak, in place, perhaps twenty years or more earlier in time, comes "Who is Sylvia?" where the proper name itself and the use of it are simply "signatures," guarantees of prosodic omnipotence, endorsed by the double rhymes of the even lines. From this point of view the arrangement of the folio is a positive advantage, because it shows us how personal and immediate this gift was. Even if some of the songs, not merely the one or two which are well known to occur elsewhere, were not his own, the general character of all is too uniform and unmistakable to present any difficulty. "Take, oh! take," the triumph of the pathetic use of the trochee; the lighter use of the same foot in "Sigh no more"; and the passing-bell variation in the dirge on Hero (where we must scan, not as in "Merrily, | merrily," but "Heavi|-ly, | heavi|-ly"); the new trick of common measure in Moth's "If she be made of white and red"; and the perfect employment of the "bob" refrain in "When daisies pied" and (with a difference) in "Tell me where is fancy bred?"—all these things are pure prosody. They do not want

<sup>1</sup> Sir Frederick Bridge, I think, recently handled this interesting subject, but I have merely seen a newspaper report of what he said.

music at all, though they will greet her very civilly when she comes, and make her welcome—if she deserves it. And this is still more the case with the twin triumphs of *As You Like It*, of which, as a matter of fact, though “Under the greenwood tree” has been mated without too much derogation, “Blow, blow, thou winter wind” still awaits an Audrey in notes that shall be its own, and *not* a poor thing.

But, luckily, all these things are well known, and our not too abundant space should be saved for others that are not quite so. Let it suffice to say, in conclusion, that, blank verse or song, sonnet or stanza, Shakespeare achieves everything that he touches; that he foots it everywhere with perfect featness; and that he always does *foot* it. His harmonies and melodies are reducible to the nicely constructed and regularly equivalenced group, not to the haphazard and blundering accent scheme. They are independent of music, though quite willing to unite with it. They require no fantastic laws of sound to explain them. The poet simply puts his hand into the exhaustless lucky-bag of English words, and arranges them—trochee and iamb and anapæst regularly, spondee and dactyl and even tribrach when he chooses—at his pleasure and for ours.

## NOTE ON *THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM*, ETC.

It seems unnecessary to say much on the partly contentious "minors" of *The Passionate Pilgrim*, etc. There are things in both sonnet- and song-form amply worthy of Shakespeare, and there are few more curious instances of the way in which the mathematically same metre can receive an infinite prosodic difference than the fall of

King Pan|dion, | he is | dead,  
and the rise of

Let | the bird | of loud|est lay

(which fall and rise, be it observed, are inappreciable on the stress-system). But they hardly give, in themselves, anything prosodic that we cannot find elsewhere, and they are doubtfully Shakespeare's as far as proof goes.

## CHAPTER II

### THE OTHER "ELIZABETHAN" DRAMATISTS

The shortness of the blank-verse season—And its causes—The practitioners — Jonson — Chapman — Marston — Dekker — Webster — Rowley — Middleton — Heywood — Tourneur — Day — The minors — General remarks — Note on Shakespearian "Doubtful" Plays.

IT would obviously be impossible, and if possible it would be supererogatory, to go through the entire works of the contemporaries of Shakespeare with the same minuteness which has been observed in dealing with Shakespeare himself, or even with as much as has been allotted to his predecessors. The very object, or one of the objects, of that minuteness in his case, was to render such an expatiation unnecessary. For he touched, at one time or another, almost all possible forms of blank verse: and it would skill but little to trace them out here as they recur in individual cases, though editors of the individual works may very properly do so. That something like such a tracing has gone to the preparation of this book the reader may be assured—that only the results should be supplied in the composition of it he may justly claim. I believe there is not a playwright, from Chapman and Jonson to Goff and Glapthorne, whom I have not considered in order to draw up these summaries; but I cannot think it necessary to march them all across my limited stage that each may answer "Here!" Indeed, too meticulous a review might positively obscure one of the most important facts to be brought out by it—the extremely rapid passing of the flower of blank verse. It

The shortness  
of the blank-  
verse season.

did not come very rapidly into full beauty—there are some forty years between *Gorboduc* and *Hamlet*. But before another forty had passed it was all overblown: it may be questioned whether its best bloom was not over in half the time.

And its causes.

That this must almost necessarily be the case with a form depending so much on individual genius, admitting so many and such perilous licences and varieties, is obvious enough. To get *immortelles*, here as elsewhere, you must sacrifice a good deal in colour, odour, and shape. But there were certain particular causes which at this time hastened its decay; and these it must be our business to bring out by or from the usual survey of the contents of the subject, if but a summary one. And first of Ben.<sup>1</sup>

The practitioners—  
Jonson.

That Ben Jonson was a great master, and probably one of our first conscious and deliberate masters, of prosody, must be clear to any one who has even the slightest knowledge of his work; and especially of the exquisite lyrics which will be handled later. But if we had only his regular plays (the masques are really part of the lyrics) it might not be easy to speak so highly of him in this particular respect. He uses a very great deal of prose—admirable prose too—but with that we have nothing to do. And when he comes to blank verse the atmosphere of prose seems to remain with him. It is correct enough: in fact it is too correct, in the earlier plays at least, while though in the later there is much more liberty taken with the number of syllables, and though both in earlier and later there is no lack of redundance, real flexibility and ease are seldom gained. It is curious that the single mould still prevails—in fact, as we shall see, it is very rarely got rid of; and even strong middle pauses, not always rigidly “middle,” do not succeed in giving the poetic-prosodic phrase, the many-centredness of which is Shakespeare’s secret. Where Jonson’s blank verse is really fine, it is usually in rather

<sup>1</sup> A great deal of work has been recently done on Jonson both in England, in America, and in France. I have a fair acquaintance with this. For our purpose, however, it is not necessary to go beyond the three-volume Gifford-Cunningham edition, published originally by Hotten (London, *n.d.*).

long and rather rhetorical *tirades* — pieces of verse-declamation which, no doubt, had a great effect on Dryden afterwards, and which would have gone as well or better in the couplet. Indeed, if we did not know that he thought couplets "the bravest sort of verses," we could have guessed it. His own couplet pieces, such as the famous eulogy of Shakespeare himself, quite carry out this idea. But for all this no disrespect is intended to the actual "blanks." *Sejanus* is perhaps the chief place for a blank-verse line which marks the transition from Marlowe to Dryden himself in might and weight; while it is not a little noticeable that in the fine speech<sup>1</sup> of Arruntius here, and in others, the *polycentric* state is by no means ill-attained.

The fact is (and though a certain kind of commentator would take it as a natural result of the traditional hardness and ruggedness of Ben's disposition, it is a most surprising contrast with the sweetness of his lyrics) that all his blank verse is *hard*, though all is not rugged. From *Every Man in his Humour* or *The Case is Altered*, whichever he may have really written first, to the fragment of *The Fall of Mortimer*, we have nearly forty years' practice in the medium. Some of the best passages are really fine; not merely the speech of Arruntius just glanced at, which is really in the noblest Roman tone; not merely the brilliant extravagance of Sir Epicure's sensual visions in *The Alchemist*;<sup>2</sup> not merely Catiline's great speech to

<sup>1</sup> Or speeches, as they actually meet the eye in Act IV. Sc. v. But that which begins as a soliloquy—

Still dost thou suffer, Heaven? will no flame,  
No heat of sin, make thy just wrath to boil  
In thy distempered bosom, and o'erflow  
The pitchy blazes of impiety?

is really continued, after not a little dialogue and incident, by

I would begin to study 'em, if I thought  
They would secure me, etc.,

and

He is our monster: forfeited to vice  
So far, as no racked virtue can redeem him,

and the rest.

<sup>2</sup> And roll us dry in gossamer and roses

is a good example here.

the soldiers when he is driven to bay,<sup>1</sup> and some of the long and undramatic but powerful *tirades* of *Cynthia's Revels*, and the *Poetaster*, and *Volpone*, and *The Devil's an Ass*, and even the "dotages"; but very many smaller and shorter passages scattered everywhere. Still, the hardness is everywhere too; the verse is rock or metal, not flesh.

And what is most curious and interesting of all is that at the touch of rhyme the rock, the metal, *becomes* flesh. I do not refer to the inserted lyrics, though the choruses interspersed in the austere verse of *Catiline*, grave as they are, would almost prove my point. This is illustrated over and over again in the exquisite *Sad Shepherd*, where the drops into rhyming are very well worth comparison with those in the not wholly dissimilar *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The youthful Shakespeare is constantly making the change, because he has not made up his mind which is the best vehicle; but his verse is equally poetical in both, and such lines as

Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,

or

The summer still doth tend upon my state,

want no rhyme and, in the first case, have no rhyme, to bring out their sweetness. The veteran Jonson wishes to soften his verse and does it, but only by the help of the dulcifier, of which he knew the use so well in other metres. Even when he does soften the blanks themselves a little as in the beautiful Earine passage suggested by Martial, he has (after the first line) to start himself with rhyme.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *V.z.* I never yet knew, soldiers, that in fight  
Words added virtue unto valiant men, etc.,

with the splendid touch (where the use of redundancy is noticeable) towards the end—

Methinks I see Death and the Furies waiting  
What we will do, and all the Heaven at leisure  
For this great spectacle.

The fine description of the battle itself by Petreus should be added.

<sup>2</sup> In the speech, "A spring, now she is dead," *ten* lines out of the *thirty* rhyme. Large passages, of course, rhyme continuously.



Some, it is known, would make *The Sad Shepherd* his latest thing; it is certainly very late, and this taking refuge in rhyme is very noteworthy. But an even greater instance of Ben Jonson's anticipation of the second half of the century, at the very moment when he was so largely influencing the first, is to be found in the other fragment—the *Mortimer* one—which was to have been in blank verse with choric interludes, less purely lyrical than those of *Catiline*, and not, it would seem, entirely unlike *Samson Agonistes*. A slice of the opening tirade, and of the short conversation with Isabel, which together make up all we have of the play, is given below with a special purpose.<sup>1</sup> Unless I am singularly deceived—and the impression was certainly a spontaneous and genuine one, proceeding from no precedent theory—there is noticeable in this, as in the work of hardly any other really Elizabethan writer, even Shirley, that curious false note which pervades all our modern dramatic blank verse, no matter whether it be Lamb's or Landor's, Taylor's or Tennyson's, not to speak of that of living persons. It is

<sup>1</sup> *Mort.* There is a fate that flies with towering spirits  
Home to the mark, and never checks at conscience.  
Poor plodding priests, and preaching friars may make  
Their hollow pulpits, and the empty aisles  
Of churches ring with that round word: but we  
That draw the subtile and more piercing air  
In that sublimèd region of a court,  
Know all is good we make so; and go on  
Secured by the prosperity of our virtues.

*Isab.* My Lord! Sweet Mortimer!

*Mort.* My queen! my mistress!  
My sovereign, nay, my goddess and my Juno!  
What name or title, as a mark of power  
Upon me, should I give you?

*Isab.* Isabel!  
Your Isabel, and you my Mortimer,  
Which are the marks of parity not power.  
And these are titles best become our love.

*Mort.* Can you fall under those?

*Isab.* Yes, and be happy!

The triumphant arrogance of the favourite and the passion of the queen are both fine. I agree with Whalley (though not quite for his reasons) in regretting the loss of the rest bitterly. But I think the extract justifies the text with the exception of the disjointed "*Isabel—your Isabel,*" and that is a touch of nature borrowed from nature itself, not art.

good poetically but not good dramatically ; it is evidently written in nature, if not in intention, to be read rather than heard. And this, which declares itself so strangely in the decayed fragment of this last work, is probably what has really been the matter all through. If we were playing the old children's game of "Animal, vegetable, or mineral?" in respect to Jonson's prosody, I should say, when questioned about his lyrics, "Animal, and of all but the very highest animation"; of his couplets, "Vegetable, and first-rate vegetable"; but of his blank verse, "Mineral: weighty, useful, sometimes brilliant, but not alive."<sup>1</sup>

It has been said that the general mark of Ben's blanks is not exactly ruggedness, but *is* hardness. On the other Chapman. hand, "Georgius Chapmannus Homeri Metaphrastes" is nothing if not rugged. The splendour of his best verse, both in meaning and in a certain sense of poetic expression, is undoubted—it surpasses, in this blank verse division, Jonson's own. Dryden's earlier judgment was better, in some ways, when he approved Chapman's "Delilahs of the imagination," than his later, when he thought them bombast. Yet they *are* bombast; and bombast not smoothly puffed out but packed and stuffed with knotty, knarry phrase, jagged in outline like a bag of nails. His early adherence to the University Wits, and his discipleship to Marlowe in particular, could hardly fail to give him an affection for the single-moulded line, whether redundant or not, and for mighty words rather disdainfully cast before the reader than complaisantly prepared for his delight. And though the dates of his work are not quite certain, we can see this general mould prevailing from *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, which is at least as old as our first certain date for Shakespeare (Meres's mention in 1598), to the very late and collaborative tragedy of *Philip Chabot*, and the (if we take them in) very doubtful *Alphonsus* and *Revenge for Honour*. In fact, the similarity

<sup>1</sup> It ought to be unnecessary, but I fear it is not, to observe that this judgment is altogether *ad hoc*. It must be supplemented with what is said on the other poems, and even when thus supplemented it must not be taken as a judgment on the whole Ben. There are few, I think, who rate him higher than I do.

of the versification, especially in such late plays, is one of the main arguments for the usually accepted canon of Chapman's works. It may be studied almost anywhere with fair confidence of its being representative; and that being the case, the undoubted centre and citadel of the position—the *Bussy* and *Byron* pieces—form a sufficient field of observation for those who do not care to undertake the very paying trouble, but the certainly rather troublesome process, of reading Chapman through.

But no one who wishes to be a real student should omit to read at least these four plays through.<sup>1</sup> The great places in them are, in the first D'Ambois play, the account of Bussy's duel with Barrisor; the powerful and libellous passage about women and the moon; the wild rants of Montsurry when he discovers his disgrace; the famous incantation passage. In the *Revenge*, Tamyra's soliloquy, several of Clermont's meditative speeches (though some of these are rhymed), and the notably Senecan overture of the Fifth Act by the ghost of Bussy, should be studied. In the *Byron* pair, attention may be paid to at least a dozen set harangues (for this is the most sententious of the plays) from the early one,

Now by my dearest marquise of Saluces,  
onward.

In all these passages, whether the subject be declamatory or meditative, the structure of the verse is remarkably similar; as may be seen from the extracts below.<sup>2</sup> It most

<sup>1</sup> The *Bussy* pair are now accessible, carefully edited, in Mr. Boas's edition (Boston, U.S.A., and London, 1905). For the others and the rest of Chapman, the three-volume edition (London, 1874), which contains Mr. Swinburne's famous Introduction, is still the best place of resort. Some have specially compared *The Gentleman Usher* with *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the comparison is not unjustified prosodically.

<sup>2</sup> (a) (The close of the D'Ambois-Barrisor duel.)

Then, as in Arden I have seen an oak,  
Long shook with tempests, and his lofty top  
Bent to his root, which being at length made loose  
(Even groaning with his weight), he 'gan to nod  
This way and that: as loth his curled brows  
(Which he had oft wrapt in the sky with storms)  
Should stoop: and yet his radical fibres burst,  
Storm-like he fell and hid the fear-cold earth.

*B. d'Amb. II. i.*

resembles, in the long and varied phases of Shakespeare's blank verse, that of *Romeo and Juliet*, where the "Wits" model is beginning to be made more supple and springy. But the suppleness and spring, which even there Shakespeare attains, are not, and never were to be, within Chapman's reach; and though he never quite fell back to the stages of *Andronicus*, or, to take an outside example, of *Jeronimo*, he is always suggesting that such a relapse is possible. At the same time he has preserved or recovered, as no other dramatist did preserve or recover, the cloudy magnificence, the "sulphurous and thought-executing fire" of these earlier writers; while the thought itself that this volcanic expression executes, is Jacobean instead of Elizabethan—deeper and wider, if rather more artificial, than Marlowe's.

Marston. Both Jonson and Chapman are verse-smiths in such long practice, and of such varied exercise, that it seemed worth while to deal with them in some circumstance; especially as both are known to have been scholars and critics as well as poets.<sup>1</sup> But most of the Elizabethan dramatists, even some who may claim to be *majorum gentium*, though they may in this respect provide cobweb-spinning for the thesis-writer, hardly supply the historian with material for solid work. The lessons of the body of their production are invaluable; the details in special

(b) (Women and the Moon.)

For as the moon, of all things God created,  
Not only is the most appropriate image,  
Or glass to show them how they wax and wane;  
But in her height and motion likewise bears  
Imperial influences that command  
In all their powers and make them wax and wane,  
So women that, of all things made of nothing,  
Are the most perfect idols of the moon,  
(Or still unweaned sweet moon-calves with white faces),  
Not only are patterns of change to men,  
But as the tender moonshine of their beauties  
Clears or is cloudy, make men glad or sad—  
So thus they rule in men, not men in them.

*Ibid.* IV. i.

I wish there were room to quote all the passages referred to in the text.

<sup>1</sup> Once more *vide* chapter on "Prosodists," and, for Chapman, *inf.* p. 111.

cases may be lightly passed over.<sup>1</sup> We know, for instance, of Marston, that his not inconsiderable work was the fruit of but a few years of his youth and earlier manhood. The couplets of his boyish satires, though extremely rough in language, and sometimes almost unintelligible, by no means push the licence of *prosodic* roughness to any great extreme ; and the sixains of *Pygmalion* are almost smooth. But in all, the line has a tendency to be singly-moulded ; and this is also the characteristic of the blank verse, in the plays where there is a good deal of prose. It is not (the caution has constantly to be repeated) that the sense does not often overrun ; but that the line-tension is not adjusted to the overrunning. He does not by any means indulge largely in extended or shortened lines, generally dropping into prose when he leaves off set verse. And he seems also to have a positive distaste for the redundant syllable. You may read pages on pages without finding a single one ; and when one comes it is odds but it is a word like "bosom," or some other of the kind, which almost offers to shut itself up into a monosyllable. It is, in fact, something of an argument (though, of course, no strong one) against *The Insatiate Countess* being his, that redundant syllables are rather common in it.

The extensive, and in great part delightful, work of Dekker. Dekker is so much dashed and brewed with collaboration, and we have (excepting the lyrics which are almost certainly his, and which will be dealt with elsewhere) so little non-dramatic verse to help us in distinguishing, that it is very difficult to speak positively of his blanks—especially as the editions of them are of the most uncertain character for all but adventurous theorists. That he was a prolific prose writer we do know ; and it cannot be quite for nothing that he slips into prose in his plays, even more easily and frequently than his fellow in Ben's black-books, Marston. But no one who has learnt what literary evidence is, can be otherwise than shy of basing conclusions on (for instance) such contrasted facts, as that in

<sup>1</sup> In *giving* the account, that is to say ; not, of course, in preparing to give it.

*Old Fortunatus* you get splendid single lines, and even passages which as a whole are splendid, hitched with breakdowns which are quite unaccountable; and so with all the rest. Repeated reading of Dekker, now designedly combined with reading of the plays in which he collaborated with Middleton, Rowley, Massinger, or Ford, now taking his writings as a whole, and now passing to theirs as wholes likewise, is a process which is indispensable to any judgment that is to be sound, but most likely to suspend positive judgment altogether. I should say that Dekker was more inclined to the redundant syllable than Marston; rather given to drop into couplet and even alternate rhyme without any intention of keeping either up; but capable of rising now and then to an almost Shakespearian *weaving* of a blank-verse passage, though he too rarely gave himself the trouble to do so.

Webster. Webster is to some extent, and only to some, less of a puzzle; for though he probably wrote a great deal in collaboration, we have little of it, and his practically undoubted work in verse is substantial. Nor have we any certain *prose* work of any size from his hand. Discarding the batch written with "Thomas Dickers," and taking the four plays which are probably his own—*The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfy*, *The Devil's Law Case*, and *Appius and Virginia*—we find a difference between the pairs that make up the quartette. The two great Romantic tragedies, infinitely above the others as poetry, are among the most irregular productions, prosodically speaking, of all the great age; the others are much less so, and *Appius and Virginia*, whether in compliment to its classical subject or not, is almost regular. It is not certain that this is not accidental, but it is at least remarkable. Refining further, one might say that *The Devil's Law Case* stands nearer to the great plays than to *Appius and Virginia*. This last, when it is not prose, is fairly regular blank verse of the middle kind, neither as wooden as the earlier, nor as limber, and sometimes limp, as the later. But in the *Devil* and the *Duchess* we find what was found in Dekker more notice-

ably still. Save rarely, and that in unimportant as well as in important speeches, the author seems hardly able to rouse himself to the composition of even a miniature tirade of regular verse. Prose, pure and simple; verse which is half-prose, or itself prose a little versified; and casual snatches of pure verse, seem to serve his turn indifferently. In fact, if there were not in these two writers such strange soars of poetry, one might sometimes think that they were not poets after all—that it was pain and grief to them to write verse, and that they shirked it as much as possible.

In Rowley,<sup>1</sup> on the other hand, it is not quite unsafe to suspect little or no liking or faculty for verse at all. The chief plays attributed to him<sup>2</sup> without a collaborator, *A New Wonder* and *A Match at Midnight*, have little verse, and what they have is of a most pedestrian character; while he generally associated with persons who had demonstrably, or almost so, a greater faculty for verse than himself. Whether, indeed, it was quite safe (as was done some years ago ingeniously in a pretty book,<sup>3</sup> and to an effect not unpleasing) to carve all or most of the verse in *A Cure for a Cuckold*, and set it down to Webster, I have doubted considerably since I began the comparisons necessary for this inquiry. But there certainly is not much reason for setting it down to Rowley, while, as will be seen, there is very strong reason

<sup>1</sup> William Rowley. His namesake Samuel is of too little importance to need comment here, and has left too little work to justify any. I may perhaps put in a *caveat lector* against the practice, common with the wilder commentator, and not quite unknown among the soberer sort, of dogmatising on the authorship of parts of plays, in the case of some writers from whom we have little and undistinguished original and certain work. The almost frantic folly with which little bits of this and that play used to be dealt out among half-a-dozen different authors, as rapidly and surely as a good dealer distributes cards, has indeed rather gone out of fashion. But I cannot agree with authorities whom I respect in assigning, for instance, parts of *Timon* and *Titus Andronicus* to such a person as George Wilkins on prosodic grounds. We really have not enough to go upon.

<sup>2</sup> We have been waiting, not *quite* twenty years, for Mr. Bullen to complete his second series of *Old Plays* with Rowley. Seven volumes are good, but eight are better.

<sup>3</sup> *Love's Graduate* (Oxford: Daniel Press, 1885), executed by Mr. S. E. Spring Rice on the suggestion and with the collaboration of Mr. Edmund Gosse.

for setting most of the verse in the rather numerous plays which he wrote with Middleton to the credit of this latter. So, too, the Dekker and Webster collaborations manifestly tempt to "hariolation." *Westward Ho!* in particular, with its immense over-proportion of prose, suddenly breaking into a verse, and rather fine verse, is something of a curiosity; while *Northward Ho!* after an early passage (not a whole scene) of passionate verse, is, except for a few cue-tags and the like, consistently prose to the end.

Middleton. The same difficulties recur in the far larger work of Middleton himself, except that we know that Middleton was very much less of a prose writer<sup>1</sup> (out of p'ays) than Dekker; and that we also know that he had been in his youth a copious practitioner in verse. I have no wish to recant the censure which, twenty years ago,<sup>2</sup> I passed on *Microcynicon* and the version of the *Book of Wisdom*, though I cannot quite agree with Mr. Bullen and say that it is "the most damnable piece of flatness that has ever fallen in my way." The flats extend behind me far too widely and too variously for that. The satires are not good satires, and the paraphrase turns an admirable book into a very dull one. But what is important to us is that neither is positively bad as verse. The couplets of the *Microcynicon*<sup>3</sup> show that Middleton adopted the half-way house of the couplet, neither distinctly stopped nor distinctly enjambed, and lived in it with ease. Nor was he ever at a loss for such verse in his nearly thirty years' usage of the stage. Some couplets, indeed, in his later *Triumphs*, etc. (*v. inf.*), are by no means bad. So, too, the sixains of the *Paraphrase*, however "wersh" they may be in phrasing and expression, are by no means of

<sup>1</sup> He *did* write prose, of course.

<sup>2</sup> *Elizabethan Literature*, p. 267.

<sup>3</sup> The opening will do well enough. I use, of course, Mr. Bullen's excellent edition (London, 1886):—

Time was when down-declining, toothless age  
Was of a holy and divine presage,  
Divining, prudent, and foretelling truth,  
In sacred points instructing wandering youth.



the lowest, or even of a very low, class as metre.<sup>1</sup> They could not have been written, as they were, during Spenser's lifetime, and not so very long after the second instalment of the *Faerie Queene* appeared, except by a man who had either given very considerable heed to the new master, or masters, of verse, or else had been born with something more than an average faculty for it. When we take account of this, and when we consider the facts noted above as to Middleton's most frequent collaborators, Dekker and Rowley, we shall be in a position to judge the probable qualities of his play-verse—not, indeed, with the rash dogmatism which has been so often indulged in on this subject, but with a reasonable hope of not going too far wrong.

And we do accordingly find that in the large number of plays attributed to Middleton, whether alone or in collaboration, some hand which was perfectly facile at blank verse is at work. The importance of couplet preparation for blank-verse writing is beyond all question; and in plays of the *Blurt Master Constable* type, in which he is so prolific, and which in others' hands tend more and more to prose, it seems all one to Middleton whether he writes prose or verse; though even when the theme seems to invite prose he often versifies. In fact, his case is exactly the opposite of those just mentioned. Webster and Dekker can write finer verse than all, save a very little, of his; but they never seem to write it with ease, and sometimes make most botcherly work of it. *He* has the pen of a ready verse-writer, and by no means of one over ready. In that other curious class of "strapped-together" plays—where a comic underplot, generally in prose, is simply tied neck and heels, without the faintest attempt to secure a more intimate union, to a tragic plot in verse—his are eminent for the excellence of the verse-

<sup>1</sup> Like as the traces of appearing clouds  
 Gives way when Titan re-salutes the sea,  
 With new-changed flames gilding the ocean's floods,  
 Kissing the cabinet where Thetis lay:  
 So fares our life, when death doth give the wound  
 Our life is led by death, a captive bound.

passages. Besides the great one in *The Changeling*, which nobody need have refused to sign:<sup>1</sup> besides others in *The Mayor of Queenborough*: the famous *loci* of *Women beware Women* and *A Fair Quarrel* give admirable illustration of Middleton's blank verse; as do things yet different in *The Witch* and the *Game of Chess* and *The Spanish Gipsy*. On the whole, however, this blank verse, as indeed might be expected from what has been said of it, is rather excellently competent than excellently distinguished. It has no very salient characteristic of its own; but something of that minor universality which brings its author some way towards Shakespeare on one side, as poignancy and humanity bring Webster and Dekker on others.

Heywood. This is even more the case with the "prose Shakespeare"; and it certainly should prevent one of the interpretations of that rather idly discussed phrase from even suggesting itself to any one who knows Heywood. He is, perhaps, of all the great class to which he belongs, the one to whom it seems least difficult to drop into fluent, easy, not very distinguished,<sup>2</sup> but by no means unaccomplished blank verse. The impression left upon me by repeated readings is, in Middleton's case, as I have said, that it was as easy for him to write in verse as not; in Webster's and Dekker's, that it was not so easy; in Heywood's, that it was easier. There is of course plenty

<sup>1</sup> The scene between Beatrice and De Flores. It is too long to quote here, but I may observe that it will be found in my *Elizabethan Literature* (p. 270 and ff.) at only a page or so's distance from the long passage in *Vittoria Corombona*, made earlier famous by Lamb (who somehow left De Flores for the less exquisite but more catholic criticism of Leigh Hunt to find). These extracts, which would together fill at least four of the present pages, will show better than any snippets can do the remarkable prosodic difference between these two great acolytes of Shakespeare—Webster fluttering up and down from lyric soar to almost prosaic "patter"; Middleton keeping a steady, though by no means monotonous, flight of well-grasped blank verse with the occasional couplet-tags.

<sup>2</sup> A word of caution on the use, here and elsewhere, of this phrase "undistinguished." It does not mean that there are not in almost all these dramatists lines and sometimes passages of extreme distinction as poetry—distinction which is not wholly unconnected (as indeed it never can be) with prosodic qualities. But in these cases "*facit inspiratio versus.*" It is not art that does it.

of actual prose in him ; but there is a great deal more verse where prose would do just as well. Everywhere—in his rather pedestrian chronicle-plays ; in the wild jumble of farcical songs and serious dialogue called *The Rape of Lucrece* ; in his endless *Ages* and dramatic dialoguings of classical mythology,—things that show us better than anything else what an all-absorbing and all-returning vortex this drama was ; in the travel-plays (again symptoms) of which he is the best master ; and in the domestic dramas of which Lamb was thinking, and of which the *Woman Killed with Kindness* is the chief,—in all these the characteristic appears. Heywood has a sort of *tap* of blank verse, not at all bad, which he can turn on at any time and the cistern whereof never runs dry or foul. But there *is* something of a tap-and-cistern quality about it, and it is never the earth-born and heaven-seeking fountain of Shakespeare.

The connection between practice in couplet or stanza Tourneur. verse and "blanks" reappears in Cyril Tourneur. I do not, indeed, recognise in him that quasi-Shakespearean variety of verse which some have seen : at any rate, his variety seems to me a variety of carelessness, rather than a variety of art. But he has, to a specially large extent, that "versification of inspiration" which has just been referred to ; and it is doubtless assisted in him by the practice above mentioned. *The Transformed Metamorphosis*, though it reads almost like a designed parody of the most extravagant style of the period, and though its diction is an undigested mishmash of terms which would have made the Limousin scholar embrace Cyril as a brother, is very far from being bad verse—is, indeed, here and there very fine verse. And the enjambed couplets of the *Funeral Poem on Vere* and the *Death of Prince Henry* display similar capacity. The consequence is that when he will give himself time, he has not the least difficulty (even in that wild nightmare, the *Atheist's Tragedy*, much more in the *Revenger's*) in producing admirable specimens of the more rhetorical and *pavanesque* blank verse. It is, however, noticeable in him as in the others of this division,

that when the blank verse is highest the couplets are highest—as for instance in the fine speech of that “ancient damnation” Castiza’s mother.<sup>1</sup> We know the dividing line in Shakespeare between the plays where he, too, suffers from this inability to keep the clue, and those where he does not. Of most of those with whom we are now dealing it may be said that they have not passed that line.

Day. One who has certainly not passed it, but on the contrary is far on the other side—one, for all this, of the “best versers” among Shakespeare’s middle contemporaries—is the last of those contemporaries to whom we shall here give specific mention. John Day,<sup>2</sup> the author of *The Isle of Gulls* and the *Parliament of Bees*, can write blank verse; indeed, the people who like such things might select a line in the *Beggar of Bethnal Green*—

Eyeless, handless, footless, comfortless,

as an attempt to naturalise in blank verse the “Chaucerian acephalic,” or something else of the same comforting, if footless as well as headless, terminological kind. But he is consistently ill at ease in this variety of numbers; and though he writes prose fairly and frequently, it is not for prose that he quits them. It is for the beloved octosyllabic and decasyllabic couplets which nearly compose the *Parliament*, and which he wields always with facility and sometimes with distinguished grace. But it is not

<sup>1</sup> That beginning “Dishonourable Act,” Act II. Scene i., of *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (Tournear’s *Works*, ed. Churton Collins, vol. ii. p. 47: London, 1878). Most of Vindice’s own harangues and soliloquies have the same composite character.

<sup>2</sup> Nobody has yet superseded, or is soon likely to supersede, that edition of Mr. Bullen’s (London, 1881), which gave such pleasure to its subscribers, and gives it still. But the *Parliament* will be found in a volume (entitled from *Nero*) of miscellaneous plays in the extremely useful *Mermaid Series*, which will also, for the more important single authors, to no small extent serve as a companion to the present survey. Even Lamb’s *Specimens*, however, short as they are, will illustrate what has been said in the cases where there has been no room for illustration here; the examples in that excellent collection, Knight’s *Half-Hours with the Best Authors*, which has, I believe, been reprinted, or in Chambers’s *Cyclopædia of English Literature*, still better; and those in Mr. Williams’s *Specimens of the Elizabethan Drama* (Oxford, 1905), best of all.

when he is giving himself up to them that his love for them is most remarkable. He cannot keep them out of blank verse itself. I think it would be very difficult to find a single long speech of Day's, which he seems to have written with any gusto at all, and which is wholly blank; while it would, on the other hand, hardly be necessary to turn over more than a page or two to find the couplet cropping up.

I do not think it necessary to attempt to characterise The minors. the prosody of still lesser writers or of anonymous plays; and I have already put in a *caveat* as to generalisations about authorship. But there are generalisations of another and much safer kind which this process fairly validates, and to some of these we may pass. Of the writers mentioned in this chapter, and of the much larger number glanced at in the last paragraph, Jonson and Chapman stand somewhat apart, for reasons given already. And both they and some others lived long enough to be affected by changes which we shall see, in their more direct and exclusive subjects, hereafter. But even they, to some extent, and the others in varying but much greater degrees, exhibit some general characteristics in relation to prosody generally, and blank verse in particular, which we may now briefly notice, using Shakespeare and the remarks already made in the last chapter on his blank verse as an admitted standard and system of comparison, not as a mere excuse for belauding or belittling.

In the first place, all, or almost all, represent the General remarks. literary generation which saw the process of the *establishment* of blank verse as the dramatic staple. Only Chapman could claim to be of the actual *conquistadores* in point of date, and it does not seem that he began drama very early. The University Wits had dropped off very soon—except Lodge, who was the least dramatic of all, it is doubtful whether one lived into more than the first year or two of the seventeenth century. Moreover, when most of the present subjects came into dramatic work, "our fellow Shakespeare" had already put all these Wits, dead and alive, down, by developing blank verse itself all

but to its full, if not to its absolutely full, capacity. But though he was the elder of most of them in years, he was too much their fellow to impose upon them as a master. Tournour has been thought to be a direct disciple; but I should rather doubt it. So has Webster; but in that case Webster's well-known reference has about it a disingenuousness which one does not somehow "see" in the author of Webster's works. Heywood and Middleton are in the precincts of Shakespeare, but not close to him metrically; the rest further still from the prosodic point of view. And I shall proceed to expound that point of view, only repeating the caution about Ben and Chapman. Undoubtedly Ben wrote his blank verse with deliberate art, but his alleged hankering after the couplet is a precious tell-tale. And the ruggedness of Chapman, his ineradicable preference for cragginess of speech and thought, must have affected every metre with him, as it did, till it was half-liquefied by the volcanic rush and volume of the fourteener and of Homer.

The others, speaking largely, nowhere show a greater contrast with Shakespeare than in the point of regarding blank verse as an art, and getting the utmost out of it in variety, as well as in power of accomplishment. It is, except perhaps in the case of Day, their staple, or at least their staple verse—the main, if not the only, wear prosodically. They show, save for special purposes, very little trace of a desire to relapse into doggerel or fourteeners. They (with the same exception) use couplet only for a change, though with varying frequency. Moreover, they are not rigidly limited to one form of blank verse. They know and occasionally use most of its varieties. The earlier of them—and perhaps all of them in their earlier work—incline to the single-moulded form, are not very lavish of redundant syllables or trisyllabic feet, nor very skilful in the verse paragraph. But in more or less degree, with more or less intention, they drop into all these things at times. Yet, in regard to the capacities of their instrument, they have neither the devotion of the virtuoso nor the keen sense of results

belonging to the craftsman. Some of them, as has been noted, use it with a sort of appearance of reluctance or effort: let it drop willingly, and take refuge in prose or in the couplet as idiosyncrasy may suggest. Some of them, as has been noted likewise, have command of it up to a certain point, show no inclination to disuse it, but seldom get its very finest tones, and hardly ever use these tones as a means of furthering their poetical and dramatic conceptions. It is the fashion to write blank verse; they write blank verse; and they do it in different measure and degree pretty well, or even very well. But that is all. It is with them nowhere near decadence, though it is sometimes short of accomplishment; but it is never constantly, or for any length of time, at its height.

It is here that the comparison with Shakespeare, if used in the right way—for instruction of prosodic life and example of prosodic manners, not for giving prizes to that boy and stripes to this—comes in with such effect. In most, if not all, of these writers we find passages of fine blank verse—passages where the verse, and even the particular kind of verse, contributes undoubtedly to the sum of poetic achievement reached and of poetic pleasure given. But this part of the work is vague and indeterminate, and it is not extraordinarily large. We scarcely ever (as in Shakespeare's great places, by the score and hundred, we can, if we choose) regard the thing as what, in Fanny Burney's day, musical people called a "lesson"—a definite accomplishment of art, inseparably, but not quite inextricably, combined with a simple appeal to the gratification of the senses and the intellect. Extension and curtailment of line; insertion or omission of trisyllabic feet and redundant endings; variation of pause; enlarging or compressing of the bulk of the poetic clause: these things, of course, appear after a fashion, because they cannot but appear; because they are, after all, the natural and irresistible prosodic outlets or mouthpieces of a certain sense and sentiment. But they appear as unpremeditated, almost as if accidental.

So, and much more, we find comparatively little of

that concordat, or give-and-take, between prose and blank verse which is perhaps the most wonderful thing in Shakespeare. As we noted above, there are passages in *Hamlet* (and, for the matter of that, in most plays of the period of perfection) where complete blank verse, segments of blank verse, and positive prose are dovetailed together in the most inconceivable fashion, so that you never stumble, but always glide easily from one to the other.

Now, that is exactly what, in these contemporaries, or most of them, you do *not* find. In the mixed scenes of some of them, if, again, not of all, the verse suggests a sort of shame-faced reflection on the writer's part—"We really *must* pull ourselves together!"—the prose a fit of recklessness—"Oh, this blank verse is really too much trouble; let us prose it for a while!"

Still, in all of them there is, be it repeated, no "decadence"; and at the best they all, or nearly all, have that indefinable command of really dramatic "blanks" which has never been recovered since Dryden, or perhaps (for his is, in the main, a marvellous galvanisation of the dying thing) since Shirley. The characteristics of it, or of this form of it, will be best summed up in juxtaposition with others in the Interchapters; but we have here given what attention seemed proper to the evidence.



## NOTE ON SHAKESPEARIAN "DOUBTFUL" PLAYS

I HAVE not thought it necessary to discuss the prosody of the vague and floating body of Shakespearian "Doubtfuls." To do so, with any profit, would require examination at least as full as that given above to the genuine dramas; and this is practically out of the question. Nor do any of them raise new or independent prosodic questions, interesting as the prosody, say of *Edward III.*, may be in itself, and as bearing on the authorship. To distinguish between that which is incumbent on a historian of English Prosody, and that which properly concerns an editor of individual works or writers, has been one of my chief cares in this book.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CONTEMPORARIES AND FOLLOWERS OF SPENSER IN STANZA AND COUPLET

Retrospect on Spenser's comparative position—Dyer—Raleigh—Greville—Sidney—The *Arcadia* verse—*Astrophel and Stella*, etc.—Marlowe—Drayton—The *Polyolbion*—His narrative stanzas—His couplet—His lyrics—Daniel—Davies—Chapman—His minor metres—His fourteener—Its predecessors—Phaer, Golding, etc.—Southwell and Warner—Chapman's comments on his own verse—Jonson—The Fletchers—Giles—Phineas—Browne—His dealings with Occleve—His "sevens"—His enjambed couplet—Wither—His longer couplet in "Alresford Pool"—His shorter—Sylvester and Basse—The Scottish Jacobeans—Ayton, Ker, and Hannay—Drummond—Stirling—Note on the Satirists.

Retrospect on  
Spenser's  
comparative  
position.

ALTHOUGH the point was carefully guarded in the last volume, it may be well to repeat in this that the separation and previous treatment of Spenser by no means implies that he is the absolute forerunner and conscious pattern of all those who write contemporaneously with him in the two great decades from 1580 to 1600. It is indeed certain that some, and probable that nearly all, *did* receive at his "noble and most artful hands" (to use Davenant's superlatively felicitous description of them) the gifts of the new spirit and the new form of poetry. But, to a very large extent also, the spirit and the form came upon him and upon them as fellow-recipients; though he had so much the largest share that he could dispense to others as well as keep for himself. And we are so much accustomed to treat him as something remote and afar, even from the great company of these contemporaries—he died so prematurely, and some who were but

a few years his juniors lived to experience and take part in such different phases of poetic development—that perhaps there is a tendency to overlook the fact of the contemporaneousness. Yet there is no doubt that Sidney and Greville, Raleigh and Dyer, were his fellow-students rather than his pupils; although Marlowe's heart of flame must have been kindled by the *Shepherd's Kalendar*, it was ashes before the *Amoretti*, and *Colin Clout*, and the two great Odes, and the *Four Hymns*, and the last half of the *Faerie Queene* itself appeared. While, not to multiply instances and double propositions, Daniel and Drayton (probably both personal friends) had done much of their most notable work, and Davies (not improbably a friend also) had completed almost all his too brief performance, before Spenser died on New Year's Day of the penultimate year of the century.

Of the four whom, as we have said, dates and facts generally exclude from mere discipleship, all but one give us rather less to say in a History of Prosody than they would give in a History of Poetry. Dyer's few and Dyer. decently famous things are pure lyric, and exhibit prosodically, as perhaps otherwise, the old respectable reformation of Turberville and Gascoigne, lightened and freshened a little by the new breath of fancy. Raleigh—Raleigh. who actually published verse before Spenser had published any, save the enigmatical deliverances to "Voluptuous Worldlings"—exhibits at first, and retains to the last of his too scanty but intensely interesting and rather puzzling work, a certain *æruugo* of antiquity. If he wrote—one has unluckily in so many cases to say "if"—"As you came from the Holy Land," he had the dateless ballad note, as it is alike in the anonyms of the fifteenth century, and in Blake, and in "Proud Maisie." The last verses in the Gatehouse blend Donne with Sackville in certain tones, but add a burden, an "underhum" which is that of the despised vaunt-couriers of the first twenty-five years of Elizabeth; and there is the same in "The Lie." Once more, Gascoigne and Turberville would have written it, if they could. He experiments a good deal, as in the

curious "Fain would I, but I dare not," where exact prosodic arrangement is rather optional, though its general lines are clear; and in the strange variety (which suggests well enough the imagined presence of the Shadow of Death, though that presence seems actually to have been set back) of "Give me my scallop-shell of Quiet." *Cynthia* seems to have been in various metres, quatrains, and tercets, and what not, including, unless the copyist has mistaken, a very curious section of Alexandrines; while the Sidney epitaph (once more doubtful) gives us the *In Memoriam* quatrain, but with decasyllabic, not octosyllabic, lines, and may perhaps have suggested to Jonson the happy, though by himself apparently unvalued, thought, of razing the clumsy galleon to a gallant frigate.<sup>1</sup>

Greville. Fulke Greville<sup>2</sup> would not be Fulke Greville if he were not difficult, at any rate in appearance; and his difficulty extends to his prosody. There are flippant persons who have asked why he should have written *Alaham* and *Mustapha* at all? It is certainly not flippant to ask the question why he wrote these singular things in such a still more singular confusion of metre. Not only does he never seem to know whether he means to write blank verse, couplet, terza rima, quatrain, or extended stanza, but it may almost be said that he apparently seems to mean to write them all at the same time, or to have written the things separately in each form and then made a sort of *pot-pourri* of the variants. Again and again one form seems to emerge from the chaos, only to vanish again. The intelligent and candid Langbaine shows that he may (without irony this time) be also called "ingenuous," by observing of *Alaham* that "'Tis mostly written in

<sup>1</sup> Both Dyer and Raleigh, with many others, will be found in Dr. Hannah's admirable *Courtly Poets*, more than once printed in the "Aldine" series. How easily the Sidney piece "shuts up" into pure *In Memoriam*, the following verse shows:—

Drawn was thy race [aright] from princely line :  
Nor less [than men] by gifts that nature gave,  
The [common] mother that all creatures have,  
Doth virtue show, and [princely] lineage shine.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. Grosart, 4 vols. Privately printed, 1870.

rhyme." 'Tis ; but in rhyme of what sort it would have puzzled the amiable Gerard to tell. The choruses, on the other hand, are mostly downright "poulter's measure" here ; while in *Mustapha*, the dialogue of which is the same jumble as that in *Alaham*, they take various stanza-forms. These stanza-forms are also used correctly enough in the almost equally strange "treatise" poems of *Monarchy* and *Religion* ; but it is, of course, on *Calica* that Brooke's prosodic, not less than his poetic, interest rests. Its "sonnets," though there are a few actual quatorzains among them, adopt that form so rarely, and with such an obvious absence of any recognition of an even prerogative right in it, that they are better not classed with sonnets generally. It is quite clear from them that any prosodic oddities of which Greville may be guilty elsewhere are merely his fun. He is bound as an Areopagite to try "versing" sometimes. But (and this is really funny as well as instructive) the central poetic heat which he had in such great measure, and the superficial case-hardening of obstinate idiosyncrasy which he had in no less, combine to transform the thing. He tries to write sapphics, and in lieu of the abortions or burlesques which generally result<sup>1</sup> from that attempt in English, lo and behold ! we have a really lively thing in true English metre,<sup>2</sup> where the natural scansion is three five-foot iambics with redundant ending, and one two-foot ditto. Since the alliterative rebels capitulated to rhymed stanza, more than two centuries earlier, there is no more agreeable instance of the triumph of the right. But Brooke has plenty of other interesting prosodic things in this charming collection—the combination in which of strangeness, sweet-

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Swinburne's

All the night sleep came not upon my eyelids

is, of course, the great exception. But the least unnatural sapphics in any modern language seem to me Carducci's in Italian.

<sup>2</sup> Eyes, why | did you | bring un|to me | these gra|ces ?  
 Graced to | yield won|der out | of her | true mea|sure ;  
 Measure | of all | joys ! stay | to fan|cy tra|ces  
 Model | of plea|sure.

ness, and strength makes it more fascinating every time it is read, though one must acknowledge that Brooke leaves his readers to do a good deal that a poet is usually supposed to do ready to their hand. When he shifts from the sinewy decasyllables of his opening pieces to the exquisite lightness of such things as—

You little stars that be in skies,  
All glory in Apollo's glory,  
In whose aspects conjoinèd lies  
The Heaven's will, and Nature's story :

when he breaks out into that astonishing expostulation—

I, with whose colours Myra dressed her head !—

and puts fire into the too commonly slow and languid sixain ; or when he once more takes the lighter and more fantastic touch in

Faction that ever dwells  
In courts where Wit excels,  
Hath set defiance :  
Fortune and Love have sworn  
That they were never born,  
Of one alliance :

when he helps to start the mixed eights and sevens which were to give delightful things for forty years to come, with

In the time when herbs and flowers  
Springing out of melting powers,—

in all these cases and many others we see that there is more than experiment, much as there is of that—there is achievement also.

The great achiever, however, as well as the great experimenter of the group is, of course, "Astrophel" himself. He appears, with all his graciousness, to have been a person who had distinct opinions of his own, and was by no means likely to be led by anybody ; nor, be it remembered, did he apparently know Spenser very early ; nor did his fancy lead him, by any means, in exactly or

nearly the same paths. By the date of Sidney's death Sidney, the greater poet had at least published no original sonnets, he had quite clearly got over his passing fancy for classical "versing," and he never at any time seems to have been given at all to the shorter and slighter lyric measures. Now Sidney's work may be divided almost completely under these three heads; and not merely from this fact, but from the much less precisely definable but really more trustworthy *aura* and atmosphere of the two men's work, I should judge that, with whatever understanding and appreciation of each other, they worked almost independently, though almost all others worked more or less dependently on them. For this latter reason, as it affects Sidney, his sonnets and songs as well as those of Greville may be separated from the main and later flower-heap of Elizabethan sonnet and lyric, while the interesting but impossible division of "versing" almost necessarily finds a place here.

"Interesting but impossible"; and as nobody better than Sidney could give the interest, so nobody could better expose the impossibility. Spenser, as we have seen, "cohorresced and evaded" early. Sidney had hardly time for this pusillanimity; and it is not certain that he would ever have shared it, for the *Defence-Apology* shows that he was much eaten up of neo-classic delusions. And it is noticeable that the rhythms do not in his hands, as in those of his friend Fulke Greville, suffer a happy change into true English prosody. They play the strict and lamentable game.

Indeed, the mixture of them in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*,<sup>1</sup> with other things equally characteristic of the time, makes this pretty extensive collection of verse one of the main *points de repère* in the history of English prosody. The thing could not have been done—at least by any one with a quarter of Sidney's critical and poetical genius—after Spenser. If we compare it

<sup>1</sup> The *Arcadia* verse is most conveniently extracted and set together in Dr. Grosart's "Fuller Worthies" edition of the *Poems* (2 vols., 1873), and there fills some 180 pages.

with *The Shepherd's Kalendar* it shows us clearly how far Spenser was ahead of and above his friend in the combination of these two gifts. A quatorzain in poulter's measure is followed by an ordinary decasyllabic one; that by a decasyllabic dizain on sonnet (*English* sonnet) principles; and this again by a sixain similarly arranged, but in octosyllabics. Then comes a song; then continuous Alexandrines which were no doubt intended for classical iambic trimeters, and which dwindle to tens admitting lyrical admixtures. At last Sidney takes up "the burden of the South"—the regular classical metres themselves. And which are the worse, Dorus his Elegiacs, or Zelmane her Sapphics, is a question which might be referred to a mixed committee of Ancients and Moderns—say Bavius, Codrus, Sternhold and Hopkins, with Alaric Attila Watts for chairman. The comparison of these Sapphics<sup>1</sup> with Greville's is really most luminous. The pair, however (Dorus and Zelmane, I mean), are quite satisfied with themselves; and proceed to an enormous dialogue in pure hexameters, clattering like the pans and the pots to which Lockhart (though not quite in that sense) compared Alaric Attila's own verses. Of course, Sidney being Sidney, there cannot but be some poetry even here; and much more in the native or naturalised metres which he still combines with this unnatural and unnaturalisable "rhythm of the foreigner." And there is, of course, always the delight, the "rock in the weary land," of

What tongue can her perfections tell,  
or

Why dost thou haste away,  
O Titan fair, the giver of the day?

and the like after the grotesques. But both divisions are equal documents for the fact that, in prosody, Sir Philip

<sup>1</sup> Thus, not ending, ends the due praise of her praise.  
Fleshly veil consumes; but a soul hath his life  
Which is held in love; love it is that hath joined  
Life to this our soul.

This is either very bad "Needy Knife-grinder," or else mere prose.



was still Sir Philip the Seeker ; and that he was not sure when he had found.

Yet he had found, and greatly, even in these very *Astrophel and Arcadia* poems ; and much more in *Astrophel and Stella* *Astrophel and Stella, etc.* and in some of his miscellanies. There cannot be much doubt that though Wyatt and Surrey introduced the sonnet into English, it was Sidney who made it popular, determined its form, sowed its seed broadcast among the fertile poetic soil of the time. It is not necessary to lay much stress on the highly respectable argument that Sidney could not possibly have written sonnets to a married woman, in order to carry the date of the *Stella* series back to 1580 or earlier. The Fury with the abhorred shears herself cuts off all possibility of their being later than 1586 ; and by that time nothing of any merit in the kind but Watson's *Hecatompethia* had made its appearance. No doubt Watson's frigidity helped the vogue of this incomparable form as well as Sidney's fire ; but it must be remembered that the *Hecatompethia* pieces are not quatorzains at all, though the *Tears of Fancy* are. Here also Sidney experiments ; he cannot help it. He uses Alexandrines ; and at least tries the Petrarchian form. But in the main he is a true English sonneteer ; and we shall return to him as such.

The songs, on the other hand, are free, and almost make amends for Spenser's reluctance to enjoy such liberty. There was nobody in English, not even Chaucer, from whom Sidney could have learnt the art of playing on a word for its sound and echo as he does in the first song on the word *You* ; and, old as double rhymes are, they had never been made to yield quite such sweetness. The enclosed rhymes of the Second ; the trochaic intermixture of the Fourth ; the dainty "sixes of six" in the Sixth ; the quaint quintets of the Ninth,—all these things show that English prosody has entered into her kingdom, and is exploring the riches thereof. And outside of *Astrophel* the same thing is shown by the indignant concert of "Love is dead," the charming *Guitare* (it is actually "to a Spanish tune") "O fair ! O sweet ! when

I do look on thee,"<sup>1</sup> and the sober rapture of that other to *Wilhelmus Van Nassau*.<sup>2</sup> He had found; and he taught all fit seekers how to find likewise.

Marlowe. There is perhaps no more extraordinary instance, both of the intrinsic power of metre and of its strange faculty of adapting itself to the genius of the individual, than the non-dramatic verse of Marlowe. Except the famous "Come live with me" (which has more charm than character, and might have been written by anybody who could have written it at the time when it was written) and a few doubtful, or not doubtful, epigrams and sonnets, all this verse is couched in the rhymed couplet—original and gorgeous in *Hero and Leander*, adapted and familiar in the Ovidian *Elegies*. In both, with an extraordinary unity in diversity, the character of the verse is as opposite as possible to that of Marlowe's "blanks." That the quality of the poetry is the same only makes the thing more interesting. In his plays Marlowe, as we have seen, though he discards and obliterates the mere stump of *Gorboduc* (once more let us not forget the contrast of this and Sackville's rhyme-royal), retains single-mouldedness; and while he clothes with thunder the neck of his charger, restrains him always to stately paces. In the poems, at least in *Hero and Leander*, the verse melts and ripples, or

<sup>1</sup> O fair ! O sweet ! when I do look on thee,  
In whom all joys so well agree,  
Heart and soul do sing in me.  
This you hear is not my tongue,  
Which once said what I conceived,  
For it was of use bereaved,  
With a cruel answer stung.  
No : though tongue to roof be cleaved,  
Fearing lest he chastised be,  
Heart and soul do sing in me.

In these lines iamb and trochee play cat's-cradle together quite ravishingly.

<sup>2</sup> Who hath his fancy pleasèd  
With fruits of happy sight,  
Let here his eyes be raisèd  
On Nature's sweetest light ;  
A light which doth dis sever  
And yet unite the eyes—  
A light which, dying never,  
Is cause the looker dies.

canters and dances (whatever metaphor be preferred) with unceasing mobility. There can be very little doubt that this most fascinating and popular poem was the instigator of Browne and others in the relaxed and enjambed couplet at the earlier part of the next century; it may even have had something to do with *Thealma and Clearchus* (if *Thealma and Clearchus* is as early as it ought to be to carry out Walton's attribution); and good wits have thought that it influenced Keats quite as much as any later example. The couplet is more distinctly enjambed in *Hero and Leander*, more often (as its connection with the elegiac almost necessitated), stopped in the Ovidian translations, but there is the same mobility in each. For splendour of vowel-colour and music the fragment of a heroic poem, of course, stands alone.<sup>1</sup>

It is not easy to exaggerate the prosodic importance of Drayton, though it is an importance very difficult to illustrate, and not very easy even to estimate, so long as we have no complete edition of his immense work in its proper chronological order, and with its unusually numerous variants of correction, substitution, addition, and omission.<sup>2</sup> That he wrote verse steadily for some forty

<sup>1</sup> Even a mere scrap may show this—

On this feast-day—O cursed day and hour !—  
Went Hero thorough Sestos from her tower  
To Venus' temple, where, unhappily,  
As after chanced, they did each other spy.  
So fair a church as this Venus had none :  
The walls were of discoloured jasper-stone,  
Wherein was Proteus carved ; and overhead  
A lively vine of green sea-agate spread,  
Where by one hand light-headed Bacchus hung,  
And with the other wine from grapes out-wrung.

Or better still, but shorter, the passage in the second Sestiad—

Where the ground,  
Was strewed with pearl, and in low coral groves  
Sweet-singing mermaids sported with their loves  
On heaps of heavy gold.

<sup>2</sup> The only thing to do at present is to take the collection (*not complete*) in Chalmers, or the Spenser Society's issues, with Hooper's *Harmony of the Church* and Professor Elton's *Michael Drayton* (London, 1905), and "combine the information" as best may be done. But we are promised a complete issue in the "Cambridge Poets," which have already completed Prior and Crabbe; and a good collection of the *Minor Poems* has appeared (ed. Cyril Brett, Oxford, 1907) while this book was in the press.

years; that he had, despite his sturdy and rather recalcitrant temperament, a singular faculty of catching, and even of anticipating, the *aura* of the time, so that he is by turns representative of strictly Elizabethan, of Jacobean, and even of Caroline poetry; that, unlike many voluminous poets, he seems to have been not in the least "thirled," as the Scotch say, to one particular metre,—all these things are in his favour from our point of view. But what is even more so is that, as in the poet who was born just to succeed him, and who resembles him in so many ways—Dryden,—and as in one or two others of the difficult class between the absolute "Firsts" and the unpromotable "Seconds," his redoubtable craftsmanship wrestles with, and often conquers, in this respect as in others, the difficulties over which his mere genius would not enable him to prevail. Like nearly all such, he seems to have been an untiring experimenter; perhaps a little exposed to the danger of those who have the Ulyssean indefatigableness without the Ulyssean astuteness, and who therefore persevere in experiments promising no great success, but in this very point infinitely superior to those who are too clever to dare at all. It may be added that, at one time at any rate, Drayton was a very popular poet—though, like nearly all very popular poets, he had to pay later for his popularity,—and that he holds a great position in what was *the* prosodic business of the early seventeenth century, the question of the couplet.

One of his experiments—about the most daring and the most sustained forlorn hope in all prosodic history—we may as well despatch first. One seems to detect, even in some of Drayton's few but faithful champions, a kind of wish that he had not written it; while those who are not the elect dismiss it (probably on very slight acquaintance) as a respectable, or not even respectable, monstrosity. I cannot agree with either of these views. In some moods I am a very little prouder of being an Englishman than I should have been if the *Polyolbion* did not exist—if the "strange Herculean task," so worthy

in itself of any Hercules, had been grappled with in a less Herculean manner. But, speaking as a mere prosodist, I must of course confess that the continuous Alexandrine, seriously treated at very great length, is an impossible metre in English.<sup>1</sup> I do not believe that any line longer than a fairly elastic decasyllable will do as such a vehicle in our language: unless, indeed, it be the old fourteener. For there is nothing of which English is so impatient as monotony, or of which it is so avid as variety. If you pause the Alexandrine exactly at the middle, you cannot escape monotony; and if you attempt a variable pause, "sixes and sevens," literally as well as metaphorically, will be the result. Whether any poet has ever tried equivalenced Alexandrines copiously and with success, I do not at present remember; but I should not augur well of the experiment.

At the same time, I am bound to say that it is not impossible to establish a "*Polyolbion* habit," in which, as the medical persons say, this Alexandrine is well borne. You must observe cæsura in reading; but it becomes by degrees as tolerable as that of the Popian couplet, if not a little more so, and is certainly not much more monotonous. In consequence, probably, of the hugeness of his task, which precluded nicety of revision, Drayton has not always distributed prosodic phrase as happily as he might; for instance, the two halves—

Her brave Pegasian steed  
The wonder of the West,

(for the Berkshire White Horse) would have made an admirable line if put together. But he has often done this; and if his selection was originally wrong, it was *non ingratus error*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sidney's Alexandrines (the chief examples that may be quoted against me at this time) do *not* run to any great length. For the reasons of its better success in *Fifine at the Fair* we may wait till we come to that poem.

<sup>2</sup> Here is a fairly average specimen:—

Whenas the pliant Muse, with fair and even flight,  
Betwixt her silver wings is wafted to the Wight,—  
That Isle, which jutting out into the sea so far,  
Her offspring traineth up in exercise of war;

His narrative  
stanzas.

Not a great deal need be said of the octaves, in which he, like Daniel, couched his principal "history," *The Barons' Wars*, and in which he also wrote some of the minor ones—*The Miseries of Queen Margaret*, *The Battle of Agincourt*, etc. ; or of the rhyme-royal of others—*Robert Duke of Normandy*, *Matilda the Fair*, etc. ; or of the sixains of yet others. Spenser had once for all taught poets who were teachable the outward form and fashion of these things—had supplied them with the perfect art of poetical bottle-making in stanzas. They had to fill the bottles with their own wine, of course, and the vintages and growths differed. But, as a rule, they ran the bottles themselves into very much the same moulds. Drayton (whose special interest as a *conscious* prosodist will occupy us later) seems to me to have been least happy in these numbers ; they encouraged his tendency to be prosaic in a different fashion from that in which they encouraged Daniel's, but to much the same degree. It is, no doubt, wrong ; but I can never open *The Miseries of Queen Margaret* without having in mine ear certain blank-verse lines written perhaps not so long before by (as I feel sure) another Warwickshire man—

I called thee then, vain shadow of my fortune.

And I find it difficult to read flat octaves that day any more. But flatness and Drayton are, fortunately, only occasional companions. She comes on him when he is

Weary, forswat, and vill of vayn

---

Those pirates to put back, that oft purloin her trade,  
Or Spaniards or the French attempting to invade.  
Of all the southern isles she holds the highest place,  
And evermore hath been the great'st in Britain's grace.  
Not one of all her nymphs her sovereign fav'reth thus,  
*Embraced in the arms of old Oceanus.*  
For none of her account so near her bosom stand,  
'Twixt Penwith's furthest point and Goodwin's queachy sand.

Drayton, as in this last line, often manages his frequent proper names with great skill. I think Macaulay learnt the trick for *The Armada* from him, as well as from Æschylus.

at dogged task-work ; but he shakes her off when he is himself. It is in his couplet and his numerous lyrical experiments that his great prosodic value and interest lie, and to these we may now turn.

His importance in the couplet has been, and must His couplet. always be, more and more recognised the more he is studied ; but there are few points on which the promised complete edition, with various readings and forms, is more required. In *Idea*, *The Shepherd's Garland* (as later entitled, *Pastorals containing Eclogues*), there are no pieces wholly in couplet, but there are several in stanzas with final couplet. Now this, as has been and will be said and seen, always acts as an encouragement, sometimes a very strong encouragement, to closing the form. And the *Legend of Gaveston*, which is possibly of 1593, the year of the death of Marlowe, and two years after Spenser's *Complaints* with *Mother Hubberd*, is again in such a stanza—sixains this time. The final couplets here are usually sententious and self-enclosed ; but they often have double rhymes, which tends towards enjambment. *Matilda*, which follows, extends itself to rhyme-royal, and here the couplet again dogs the step. So it does even in the sonnets of *Idea*. And so again the rhyme-royal of *Mortimeriados*, the first version of *The Barons' Wars*, was expanded into octave in the second, and the couplet of the octave is of all the most insinuating, if not positively self-imposing. (Is there anything in the fact that Fairfax came between ?) And though the new legend, *Robert of Normandy*, which accompanied *Matilda* and *Gaveston* in 1596, is in rhyme-royal, *ecce iterum* the couplet. Meanwhile he had actually tried it by itself in a poem (which he never re-issued, though he used parts of it in *The Man in the Moon*, and which is not to be found in the most accessible editions of his works), *Endimion and Phæbe*. There is no doubt that Mr. Elton is right in associating this with *Hero and Leander*. Even without Drayton's known and attested admiration for Marlowe, it would be certain. But there is here much less tendency to enjambment, and when Drayton returned

to the metre in *England's Heroical Epistles* there was less still. He is constantly emphatic, and not seldom positively antithetic. Now, emphasis and antithesis are the certain begetters of closure. And always he held nearer to this closed model than to the other, though you may find things in him that might almost be Waller, and things that might almost be Browne, for date and character combined.

His lyrics

He, however, like Jonson and not a few others, is an instance of how easily sturdy and even rugged natures can adjust themselves to the lightest and most delicate versification. Apparently, when he resolved to write the *Polyolbion*, he wisely determined, being already, provided with the famous "something craggy to break his mind upon," to provide himself likewise with something flowery on which to rest it. As Mr. Elton says, his lyric gift came late, but the light of the eventide was coloured fair. The Odes, the *Muses' Elizium*, *Nymphidia*, and the other poems which he wrote in lighter measures during the last five-and-twenty years of his life, are very charming things, and hardly more than one of them can be said to be known as it deserves. How much the measure has to do with the admirable excellence of the *Ballad of Agincourt* need only be urged upon persons who are incapable of understanding what is urged on them. Out of the drama, poets were at this time so very shy of trisyllabic feet, especially as regular things, that one at once sees Drayton's mastery and independence, while no fit reader has ever missed the triumph of

Ferrers and Fanhope.<sup>1</sup>

But Drayton has plenty more things besides this for bow and lyre. He is still in the period of experiment,

<sup>1</sup> I do not think I need apologise very much for occasionally suggesting "off" prosodic considerations to my readers. Some of them may like to contrast the Ballad with Carducci's *Satana*. I need not "sign-post" the agreements and differences. Of course Carducci did not introduce this metre, which is an old one in Italy. In fact, Mitford long ago actually compared Drayton (in the "Sirena" piece) and Metastasio, though, I regret to say, with not a little misunderstanding of the English beauty.



and sometimes he strikes them into jangle, but very seldom. His lyrical "Why not?"<sup>1</sup> is not the happiest piece of verse, and he should not have praised that dreadful person Soothern. But 'tis astonishing how much pleasanter it is to hear a good writer praise a bad one than to hear a bad writer blame a good! The splendid "New Year,"<sup>2</sup> where Mr. Elton has not failed to notice a Swinburnian touch; the pretty "Valentine" (many good things went out with St. Valentine); "The Heart"<sup>3</sup> (could he possibly have known Alexander Scott?); "The Virginia Voyage,"<sup>4</sup> even the Skeltonics,<sup>5</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> And why not I, as he  
That's greatest, if as free  
(In sundry strains that strive  
Since there so many be),  
The old lyric kind revive?

I will : yea, and I may.  
Who shall oppose my way?  
For what is he alone,  
That of himself can say,  
He's heir of Helicon?

- <sup>2</sup> Rich statue, double-faced,  
With marble temples graced,  
To raise thy godhead higher,  
In flames where altars shining  
Before thy priests divining  
Do od'rous flames expire.

*Give her th' Eoan brightness  
Winged with that subtle lightness  
That doth transpierce the air;  
The roses of the morning  
The rising heaven adorning  
To mesh with flames of hair.*

- <sup>3</sup> If thus we needs must go,  
What shall our one heart do,  
This one made of our two?

- <sup>4</sup> Britons ! you stay too long,  
Quickly aboard bestow you,  
And with a merry gale  
Swell your stretched sail,  
With vows as strong  
As winds that blow you.

- <sup>5</sup> The Muse should be sprightly,  
Yet not handling lightly  
Things grave, etc.

are all documents for us of the paradise of lyric song that was to atone for other not at all paradisaical things in England for the next fifty years. And there are delightful things in the "Nymphals" of the *Muses' Elizium*—a use of the common measure not quite reaching the ineffableness which was (perhaps had been already) introduced by Ben or Donne, but a form of its own, quietly musical—and the curious variation on the Agincourt measure in the duet between Nais and Cloe.<sup>1</sup> Above all things,

Near to the silver Trent  
Sirena dwelleth,

exhibits the old trick of knapping verses sweetly as few other things do. And as for *Nymphidia*, who shall overpraise the inimitable lightness and childishness of its rippling melody? It is burlesque, of course; there is no witchery about it, and its figures are rather puppets than fairies, and so want puppet music. But prettier marionettes you shall hardly find, nor a prettier "marionette symphony" for them to dance to.

Daniel. Daniel and Davies, the two poets who are in many ways closest to Drayton, require rather less notice in this place: first, because their practice is a good deal less varied than his; and secondly, because their even excellence in this respect rather deserves encomium than necessitates examination. The name of Daniel is indeed clear and venerable in the history of English prosody; but mainly on account of the prose-tractate which will be noticed later in its proper place, as will be his sonnets with their kind. Otherwise he is chiefly noticeable as having (he was of the Sidneian family, as they said then) almost at once caught the great lesson of prosody which Spenser had taught. But the extreme sobriety of Daniel's genius made it easier for him to be orderly than to be anything more. The octave, which is his vehicle in the *History of*

<sup>1</sup> Nais says—

Cloe, I scorn my rhyme  
Should observe feet or time:  
Now I fall, now I climb—  
What is't I dare not?

*the Civil War*, and to which he recurs with evident predilection in other places, is accomplished enough; but it is rarely inspired or inspiring. The triumph of it—the one really magnificent thing that Daniel did, in the lines to the Countess of Cumberland—

He that of such a height has built his mind,

comes from the singular coincidence of stately quietism in verse and thought. He has to modulate a theme which would be almost as effective unmodulated, and he does it splendidly; but the process is rather rhetorical than poetical.<sup>1</sup> He can and does<sup>2</sup> derive from his sonnet practice tender and more strictly poetic notes, as in the opening line of the Lady Anne Clifford poem—

Unto the tender youth of those fair eyes,

where the adjustment of “tender” and “fair” has the secret; he can be suddenly fulminant, as in the line which Wordsworth “lifted” like a Borderer as he was—

Sacred religion! mother of form and fear.<sup>3</sup>

He can write good rhyme-royal and good sixes, and we may be able to recur to his few lyrics. But on the whole, prosodically speaking, he is more generally *adequate* than anything else. Now adequacy is good, but it is not delicious.

With regard to Sir John Davies it ought never to be Davies. forgotten that his poetical work is the product of only a few years of his youth.<sup>3</sup> When this is remembered it may perhaps be allowed that, for prosodic practice, he ranks higher than Daniel. Indeed, of the three works by which he is chiefly known, two have a prosodic originality which cannot but make one think that if Davies had been in the conditions of Drayton he would have been

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps in connection with this he altered the rhyme scheme to *abcbcd*, so that each stanza starts with a blank-verse effect.

<sup>2</sup> There are others hardly less good than this in the original *Musophilus*.

<sup>3</sup> *Orchestra* (1594) was written before he was five-and-twenty; all the rest before the Queen's death, when he was not thirty-five.

at least as important for us, and perhaps more so. *Orchestra*—that whimsical, but by no means frivolous fragment, which combines the information of two very different kinds of "Academy"—is in rhyme-royal of a most excellent pattern, less solemn and plangent (indeed solemnity and plangency were here required, the first but little, and the last not at all) than Sackville's, but as resonant, flexible, and full. Two of its own lines—

So subtle and so curious was the measure  
With so unlooked-for change in every strain,

may almost be applied to it. That the more Spenserian *Nosce Teipsum* should be in quatrains is again a very interesting prosodic fact at this early period. And it is by no means clear that the metre does not here, to some extent, justify itself against the objections which will be brought elsewhere against it as practised by Davenant, and even by Dryden. It never can be a good vehicle of narration, but if—*if*—theological-philosophical argument is ever to be put into verse at all, this sententious, not inharmonious, not too involved or too scrappy vehicle seems good for it. Still, to see what a verse-smith Davies was we have chiefly to look to *Astræa*, where the pervading acrostic "Elizabetha Regina" is wrought into two fives and a six of almost Caroline quaintness and elegance combined. It is no wonder that Sir John should have been fond of dancing, which is indeed very close to prosody, and like it may be much assisted by, but is by no means to be dictated to, by music. On this point he went a little wrong in *Orchestra* itself, but excusably, for he never finished or reviewed that poem.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Who doth not see the measures of the moon,  
Which thirteen times she danceth every year?  
And ends her pavin thirteen times as soon  
As doth her brother, of whose golden hair  
She borroweth part, and proudly doth it wear:  
Then doth she coyly turn her face aside  
That half her cheek is scarce sometimes descried.

The quatrains of *Immortality* would require rather too long an extract, but one of the *Astræa* "Hymnes" must be given:—

Large as is the amount of Chapman's non-dramatic Chapman. poetry, a prosodic study of it need deal with but two things—his couplet and his fourteeners; while the handling of the former need not be very protracted. For the lyre, and even for those stanza measures which always have something of the lyrical in them, he seems to have been less disqualified than disinclined. The nine-lined couplet-ended staves of *Ovid's Banquet of Sense* are by no means destitute of a grave beauty; and the *Song of Corinna* therein is not unmusical. No one need speak prosodic evil of the sixains of *The Amorous Zodiac*, or of the mono-rhymed octosyllabic quatrains of that *Contention of Phillis and Flora* for which Chapman (most original of translators and most given to translations of all original writers, with the exception in both cases of Edward FitzGerald) went to the Middle Ages to fetch. His sonnets have a rare stateliness; he can manage divers lyrical measures in his version of Petrarch's *Penitential Psalms*. In the *Guiana* poem, though he slips into couplets now and then, he means blank verse—a notable thing at that time off the stage. But these are all mere *hors-d'œuvre* to him.

The reason why it is not necessary to say much of

## IX

## TO FLORA

E mpress of flowers, tell where away  
L ies your sweet court, this merry May,  
I n green wide garden alleys :  
S ince there the heav'nly powers do play  
A nd haunt no other valleys.

B eauty, Virtue, Majesty,  
E loquent muses, three times three,  
T he new fresh Hours and Graces,  
H ave pleasure in this place to be  
A bove all other places.

R oses and lilies did them draw,  
E re they divine Astræa saw,  
G ay flowers they sought for pleasure :  
I nstead of gath'ring crowns of flowers,  
N ow gather they Astræa's dowers,  
A nd bear to Heaven that treasure.

His minor  
metres.

his couplet is that almost everything which has been already said, in the last chapter, of his blank verse, applies to it. It is grave and noble; nor does it ever allow itself the eccentricities of Donne—the “holes that you may put your hand in” that so did annoy Sir John Beaumont. It is, in this resembling the similar verse of his contemporaries Drayton and Daniel, neither conspicuously stopped nor conspicuously overlapped, though it tries both ways at times. Perhaps—the couplet short of unbridled overlapping effecting this almost *per se*—it is a little less embroiled and obscure than the blank verse of the plays, and it is noteworthy that at its obscurest, as in the famous *Shadow of Night*, it succumbs to the temptation of enjambment most. But the prevailing characteristics are those of thought and action, not of metre. Chapman, in Mr. Swinburne’s excellent application, “cannot clear his mouth of pebbles”; but it is the flow of his speech and thought rather than of his verse that the pebbles obstruct, though they prevent this also from being very fluent. Still, there are worse things both in sound and to sight than the ripple round pebbles.

His fourteener.

But the metre which Chapman was, if not “born to introduce,” born to perfect and consummate as a vehicle of extended narrative was the fourteener. His strong attraction for it is shown by the fact that he absolutely tried both it and the couplet for part of the *Iliad*, and abandoned the latter. That he did not make a similar double attempt or experiment in the case of the *Odyssey* is, I think, sufficiently accounted for by his saturation with the almost pedantic scholarship of the age. The ancients had drawn a distinction between the simple and passionate *Iliad*, the complex and manners-painting *Odyssey*. The old fourteener, with its age-long history, its ballad associations, corresponded to the former description; the modern and rather sophisticated decasyllabic couplet to the latter. It is true that the *Odyssey* itself contains some of Chapman’s best couplet work, but both in itself and as an equivalent for the original it cannot vie with his *Iliad*. I cannot understand how any one

who can read the Greek can tolerate Chapman's *Odyssey* except as a student: one can read his *Iliad* with the original sounding in one's ears and say, "Well done our side!" The contribution of the prosody to this success is our business here; and it is the importance of it which makes appropriate what was formerly promised—a short study of the fourteener itself, in connection, but not merely in connection, with Chapman's employment of it, and in especial bearing on those earlier attempts to use it for purposes of translation which were passed over. For that Chapman was indebted to Phaer and Golding (to name no others), at least for suggesting the metre to him, there can be no manner of doubt. Of late years <sup>its</sup> there has been a certain tendency to put up the estimate of these two, especially of Golding, who was also set much above Phaer by Warton; and there has been a stately reproduction of the *Ovid*.<sup>1</sup> Here are some extracts from both on which to base criticism.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Moring and Gollancz (London, 1904).

<sup>2</sup> It may not be an uninteresting connection with "the ancestors" to take the selections from those passages which Webbe (a great admirer of Phaer) and Warton respectively admired in the two.

*Phaer* :—

Three times her hand she *bet*, and three times strake her comely breast;  
Her golden hair she tare and frantic-like with mood opprest;  
She cried "O Jupiter, O God," quoth she, "and shall 'a go?  
Indeed! and shall 'a flout me thus within my kingdom so?  
Shall not mine armies out, and all my people them pursue?  
Shall they not spoil their ships and burn them up with vengeance due?  
Out people, out upon them, follow fast with fires and flames—  
Set sail aloft, make out with oars, in ships, in boats, in *frames* [rafts?].  
—What speak I? or where am I? what furies do me enchant?  
O Dido, woful wretch, now dest'nies fell thy head doth haunt."

*Golding* :—

The princely palace of the Sun stood gorgeous to behold,  
On stately pillars builded high of yellow burnished gold,  
Beset with sparkling carbuncles, that like to fire did shine,  
The roof was framed curiously of ivory pure and fine.  
The two door-leaves, of silver clear, a radiant light did cast,  
But yet the cunning workmanship of things therein far past  
The stuff whereof the doors were made. For there a perfect *plat*  
Had Vulcan drawn of all the world; both of the surges that  
Embrace the earth with winding waves, and of the steadfast ground,  
And of the heaven itself also, that both encloseth round.

"It is not so bad," as Mr. Foker observed of his and Pendennis's libations; and Phaer at least attains sometimes to trisyllabics, virtual if not intended.

Southwell and  
Warner

But as a rule, though less than usual in these passages, the defect of all these writers—Golding perhaps escapes it oftener than the others—is what has been elsewhere termed the “lolloping” character of their verse. They seem unable to “lift” it, in the jockey’s sense, over the ground. To shift the metaphor from riding to walking, they all appear to be “down-gyved” like Hamlet in his ill-fated visit to Ophelia, and they shuffle along in the hamper of their nether garments in a truly deplorable manner. Every now and then, in a short poem, some fire of passion, earthly or heavenly, gets them out of the difficulty, as in Southwell’s magnificent *Burning Babe*; but one feels that it is not far off. The great place, however, before Chapman for observing the phenomena of the fourteener is, of course, Warner’s *Albion’s England*. And in this examination it is well not to neglect the mechanical but useful aid of typographical arrangement. The original volume is printed in actual fourteeners, and the present writer, nearly thirty years ago, took care to reproduce this in the extract given in Mr. Ward’s *Poets*. But Chalmers, in the not very “gnostical” admiration (as his own time would have said) of that time for ballad, thought fit to balladise the whole,<sup>1</sup> to the great waste of space, and to the great damage, except in a few fragments, of the verse. The splitting up, however, does make evident—what indeed could have been easily found out by any careful observer without it—certain weaknesses of the metre, unless it is managed with a great deal of art. If you make a strong break of rhythm at the eighth syllable, as in the unapproached common-measure poems of the earlier seventeenth century, you dislocate your line too much, and prevent the continuity which narrative requires. If, on the other hand, you make no break at all, the line becomes flaccid and expressionless, and hobbles or ambles along, from unmarked beginning

<sup>1</sup> Warton before him had identified Phaer’s and Golding’s metre with that of Sternhold and Hopkins; for which, of course, fight might be made. But, as a fact, the continuous fourteener and the common measure distich have differences which are not merely typographical. Each develops a different side of the common possibilities—and *should* develop it.



to unremarkable end, with the slipshod effect noted above.

To come to Chapman himself: in the first line of the Fourteenth Book—

Chapman's  
comments on  
his own verses

Not wine nor feasts could lay their soft chains on old Nestor's ear,

we find the annotation, "This first verse, after the first four syllables, is to be read as one of our tens." Now what exactly did he mean by this? and why, whatever he meant, did he take the trouble to say it in this unusual manner? There cannot be much doubt about the answer to either question. He wished to indicate that the *cæsura* is in an unusual place; and so, for him, it is. Chapman is ordinarily most punctilious about having a *cæsura*—not, of course, necessarily a stop in punctuation, but certainly a completion of possible sense and rhythm—at his eighth syllable. Here you can only get such a stop by separating adjective and substantive, which evidently troubled his careful soul; and accordingly he points out that the division of the line must be *extraordinary*; that you are not to look for the ordinary rhythm of the fourteener, but to take the first four syllables by themselves and accommodate the rest with the ordinary decasyllabic scansion. Now this very clearly shows that the fact that fourteen syllables do not make an eight-and-six, or a fourteener at pleasure, but that you ought to make up your mind with which charmer you will be happy, had not dawned on his mind. And it also shows that the Gascoignian superstitions (indeed, Chapman was nearer Gascoigne in age than any of his great contemporaries in the Jacobean time) were still rife—that the liberty of prosodising had yet to be preached. His position, in fact, is untenable on his own showing. You cannot, on any theory of prosody that is not a mere go-as-you-please anarchy, intrude a four-and-ten into a company of eights-and-sixes. But both will go together in a team of frank fourteeners as merrily and rhythmically as may be.

But he had not these crotchets always in his head.  
The voyage to Chrysa and the beautiful single line—

But when the lady of the light, the rosy-fingered morn,  
which, wisely perceiving his windfall, he repeats ; the  
description of Helen in the Third Book with that other  
jewel, a couplet this time—

To set her thoughts at gaze and see, in her clear beauty's flood,  
What choice of glory swum to her yet tender womanhood

(where, as in a thousand other places, it does not in the  
least matter whether Chapman writes Homer, the point is  
that he writes poetry) ; the fine line-conclusion—

her bright and *ominous* blaze,

in the passage of the descent of Pallas ; the interesting  
double version earlier and later, part of which shall be  
given below,<sup>1</sup> of Achilles' speech in the Ninth Book ;  
passage after passage of the Battle at the Ships, which  
seems to have specially caught Chapman's English  
imagination ; the Beguilement of Zeus, an admirable  
rendering of that admirable passage which so much  
disturbed the prudery of ancient critics ; the special  
patches of the Prayer of Ajax and the Shield of Achilles,  
—Chapman is equal to them all, in gross and in detail,  
in general effect and in the jewelry of single verses.

Of course, there are plenty of weak lines to balance

<sup>1</sup> 1598 :—

Nor all the wealth Troy held before the arms she now enfolds,  
Nor what Apollo's stony fane in rocky Pythos holds,  
I value equal to my life, spent with a pleasant mind :  
Oxen, sheep, trivets, crest-deck'd horse, fortune or strength may find,  
But of an human soul no prize nor conquest can be made  
When the white formers of his speech are forced to let it fade.

1611 :—

Not all the wealth of well-built Troy possess'd when peace was there,  
All that Apollo's marble fane in stony Pythos holds,  
I value equal with the life that my free breast enfolds.  
Sheep, oxen, tripods, crest-deck'd horse, though lost, may come again,  
But when the white guard of our teeth no longer can contain  
Our human soul, away it flies, and once gone, never more  
To her frail mansion any man can his lost powers restore.

these, and the number of them in such a poet as Chapman is a sufficient proof of the insufficiency of the metre for continual use when unequivalenced. The verse, indeed, personifying it as its own time would have loved to do, might rise in righteous wrath and say, "I am not to be blamed for such things as—

Achilles called a court  
Of all the Greeks ; Heaven's white-armed Queen, who, everywhere  
cut short,  
Beholding her loved Greeks by death, suggested it ; and he  
(All met in one) arose and said, 'Atrides ! now I see'"—

where the unconscionable inversion and syntactical muddlement might take place in any metre, equivalenced or rigid, if the poet were careless enough. But when you come, on the opposite page in the current modern edition, to such another line as—

Bright-cheeked Chryseis. For conduct of all which we must choose,

the conditions are different. The grammar is quite impeccable, and the composition likewise, but unfortunately the thing, even granting "conduct," is hardly a verse at all. And there are too many like it. The fact, of course, is that pure iambic fourteeners, like blank verse and heroic couplets, can, with a little practice, be written, after a fashion, almost, if not quite, as rapidly as prose. One could not say that Chapman never reminds us of this fact.

Now he himself saw this ; whether he saw that he saw it, is (must it be repeated ?) not of the smallest consequence. He did not see beyond his own age, and therefore did not (as he might have done if only *per impossibile* he had looked before and after to *Gamelyn* and to *Sigurd*) adopt the one device which makes the fourteener a perfect vehicle—free, yet not too free, substitution of anapæsts. But he saw a good deal ; and the result is that though his fourteener cannot be accepted as a perfect medium for so long a poem, it has lifts and bursts which make it a "grand compounder"—something which attains the high degrees without exactly complying with minute or

constant counsels of perfection. Nay, in his very third line—

From breasts heroic ; sent them far to that *invisible* cave,

he shows (as also in “ominous” quoted above) that he felt, if he did not consciously know it, the secret of the anapæst itself. From the first, too, and throughout, he knows as well (there can be no doubt here) the other secret of the variation of the pause. It would be a piquant experiment, but one of those on which millionaires might spend their money with better reason than any which can be alleged for their usual spendings, to print, not the whole (which would be as unfair as printing all Chatterton with modern spelling), but considerable parts of the *Iliad* on the principle of dividing the lines ballad-fashion where the cæsure, in sense or punctuation, corresponds ; straight on as fourteeners where the line is practically unbroken ; and in stepped fashion where the pause comes hither or thither of the middle division of eight and six. But, short of this open object-lesson of things *oculis subjecta fidelibus*, it cannot be so very difficult, for any one who is curious, to read the lines of a fair body of verse on this principle, and so discover the effect. The process should not be disagreeable to any one who has broken himself to reading in accordance with scansion ; and nobody who will not do this will ever really appreciate prosody.

Jonson. The curious contrast between the hardness of Ben Jonson’s blank verse and the softened quality, sometimes reaching *ipsa mollities*, of his lyric, has been noted above ; with the fact that the melting process is shown cumulatively in his handling of that couplet which in language a little ambiguous (see chapter on *Prosodists*) he extolled so to Drummond. That is to say, if you took all the couplet passages from the plays, and put them together with all those in the poems, there is a good deal of it. But the couplet, from its very nature, requires a very considerable field of exercise in order to allow it to display any special qualities ; and for this or that cause Ben did not give it

such a field. The epigrams are naturally couched in it for the most part; but it is rather curious that this kind, even with the wide ancient extension which he prided himself on giving to it, by no means invariably, or very often, tempted him to adopt the incisive form which it seems so naturally to invite. That to Donne comes as near as most; but, as will be seen below,<sup>1</sup> it is not exemplary. It cannot be said that the sixth line, whether scanned with elision or with trisyllabic substitution, is euphonious; in fact, it is nearly as ugly as some of Donne's own in the same kind, and suggests the same contrast of wonder with the impeccable lyrics. If this was the "hexameter-like breaking" which Ben admired, one can only be glad that he did not practise it oftener. But there cannot be much doubt that the craze for roughness in satire extended to epigram likewise, though neither Catullus nor Martial can be said here to suggest what may seem to be suggested by Horace and Persius. In *The Forest* his prepossession vanishes; but the beautiful couplets of the "Penshurst" poem are very much enjambed, as are most of the rest, especially the famous Shakespeare-piece. Indeed, they actually give ground for thinking that "broken" meant "enjambed." But of this elsewhere.

The interest of the Fletcher brothers<sup>2</sup> for us consists The Fletchers. mainly, and that of Giles (perhaps the better poet of the two) wholly, in their interesting if not exactly felicitous

<sup>1</sup> Donne, the delight of Phœbus and each muse,  
Who, to thy one, all other brains refuse;  
Whose every work, of thy most early wit,  
Came forth example, and remains so yet;  
Longer a-knowing than most wits do live,  
*And which no affection praise enough can give!*  
To it, thy language, letters, arts, best life,  
Which might with half mankind maintain a strife,  
All which I meant to praise—and yet I would—  
But leave because I cannot as I should.

<sup>2</sup> If the recent attempts to credit Phineas with *Britain's Ida* were well founded, it would be a considerable additional asset for him. But I do not see any real evidence for the assignment, and it seems to have escaped the assigners that it is an odd sort of argument to say that it must be Phineas's because it is in Giles's stanza.

variations on the Spenserian stanza. These variations may have been dictated either by mere reverence for the master, whose influence was so obvious in both, or through a desire "to create for oneself," or perhaps by a mixture of the two feelings and a hope to escape disastrous comparison by slightly innovating. It cannot be said, despite the extraordinary beauty, in a sort of præ-Raphaelite kind, of parts of *Christ's Victory* and fewer parts of the longer *Purple Island*, that either form is a success. Giles dropped line seven of the Spenserian, but retained the order of the rhymes and the final Alexandrine.<sup>1</sup> This gives a triplet at the close, which is sometimes not ineffective in itself, but seriously damages both the individual and the social merits of the stanza. From the first point of view the extraordinary unity—the "seamless coat"—of the Spenserian, is broken into quintet and triplet, inevitably in sound, and by strong temptation in sense and suggestion, like the octave and sestet arrangement of a sonnet. From the second, the accumulation of rhymes in the triplet and the culmination by the Alexandrine in the same way suggests a much stronger stop than the couplet-ending, and so arrests and injures that curious concatenation which, side by side with its individual integrity, is the glory of the great *novena*.

Phineas. Not satisfied with this, or fearing to touch it (for he had, and constantly expresses, almost as great a reverence for the brother who died so long before him as both had for Spenser), Phineas used the shears still further, and

<sup>1</sup> This form is also adopted in the curious poem on *St. Mary Magdalene* (E.E.T.S., London, 1899), but almost certainly as a *following* of Fletcher. Some would regard it as, in origin, rather a building up of rhyme-royal with an Alexandrine than as a cutting down of the Spenserian, but I think this very much less likely. Here is a stanza of Giles's own:—

The garden like a lady fair was cut,  
That lay as if she slumbered in delight,  
And to the open skies her eyes did shut;  
The azure fields of Heaven were 'sembled right  
In a large round, set with the flowers of light—  
The flowers-de-luce, and the round sparks of dew,  
That hung upon their azure leaves, did shew  
Like twinkling stars that sparkle in the evening blue.

cut off the last line of the quintet, leaving quatrain and triplet to make up a new seven-line stanza.<sup>1</sup> Whether this is better or worse in itself than the octave of Giles, I am not quite sure. I used to think it more of an improvement than I do now. But I have never varied in considering both as possessing the same faults, when compared with their original. It says something for the power which both these poets have of merging defects of form, and even of subject, in floods of poetic fancy and phrase, that they get over the defects of their form itself. But things so beautiful as those cited would look well in any garment.

The remaining metres of Phineas need slighter notice. He tried in his *Piscatory Eclogues* yet another septet, rhyme-royal with the last line extended to an Alexandrine, his brother's stanza, an ordinary rhyme-royal, sixains, Spenserians with triplet ending, quintets with Alexandrine close, heptasyllabic couplets; and in his *Miscellanies* various short lyrical mixtures. He is never prosodically incompetent; but he seems to suffer from a kind of prosodic *fidgetiness*.

William Browne, not one of the strongest of poets, Browne, but also not one of the least engaging, has more appeals than one; and it so happens that most, if not all, of these concern prosody. That he, when all Middle English poetry save Chaucer was passing into utter neglect, save by a few students, for all but two centuries, read and revived Occleve is something; that, after these two centuries, he himself was read, and, what is more, followed by Keats, is something more. It would have been lucky if the following had been only prosodic; for few people can be sorry for Keats's return to enjambment, extravagant as it may be. But there might, with

<sup>1</sup> The early morn lets out the peeping day,  
And strewed his path with golden marigolds :  
The moon grows wan, and stars fly all away ;  
Whom Lucifer locks up in wonted folds  
Till light is quenched, and Heaven in seas hath flung  
The headlong day : to the hill the shepherds throng,  
And Thirsil now began to end his task and song.

considerable advantage, have been less in *Endymion* of the overrunning of fable as well as of verse, which is characteristic of *Britannia's Pastorals*.

His dealings  
with  
Occleve.

As for the first of these connections in our matter, Browne was the first to print, as part of his own *Shepherd's Pipe*, but with full attribution, Occleve's tale of *Jonathas*. Perhaps the story, though it is one of Occleve's best pieces of work, did not please; for Browne never carried out his intention of giving the rest, which he says were "all perfect in his hands." One cannot but be sorry that he did not say something about the versification, which looks all the odder beside his own sweet and fluent style. Probably he thought, as almost everybody did for some three centuries, that you were not to expect any system in these old poets. But he showed that he had more grace than many editors of greater name, and more vaunted scholarship, by attempting no mendings. The result, of course, is that poor Occleve, who never had much smoothness to lose, is occasionally robbed even of what he has, as where

Reigned in Rome, and hadde sonnes three,

becomes

Reigned in Rome, and had sons three;

or where

Unmeeble good right noon, withouten ooth,

is turned, correctly in sense, but to the impairing of the metre, into "unmoveable." At the other end, though he reads in one place, "Thus it is said," instead of "Thus saith the book," he keeps to his text so closely as to retain the odd phrase "gyle man,"<sup>1</sup> where even modern preciseness expects that "wo" should be supplied. He himself is among the easiest and smoothest of writers, whether in octosyllable or decasyllable. In the honeyed

<sup>1</sup> Thus wrecchedly this gyle [wo]man dyed.



eights and sevens<sup>1</sup> of the first as he writes it there is indeed nothing very new or special; they were among the most frequent numbers of all poets from Shakespeare to Milton. And the perfection with which not only these mighty singers, but quite small poets, like Barnfield, and not very great ones, like Browne himself and Wither, or giants of hardly lesser than godlike race, like Jonson and Fletcher, used them, is very remarkable. On the other hand, in the enjambed decasyllabic couplet, the staple metre of *Britannia's Pastorals*, it is not clear that Browne had any direct master (save perhaps Marlowe), while he and Wither were the earliest copious practitioners in it. It is indeed necessary to repeat the caution that the thing is no actual novelty. It appears, and was bound to appear, as soon as we have any considerable practice with the couplet, in Chaucer, and it was being developed by Drayton in the generation before Browne. But before the second decade of the seventeenth century it was a variant, a sort of escape. It was only then that it became, if not dominant, a serious candidate for dominance, and so, in fact, forced its rival, the stopped form, into as definite pretensions, which at last triumphed.

It has beyond all question singular charms, especially that one for which the Latins called a woman *morigera*, and the French still call her *avenante*, while we used to call her "coming." There is nothing stiff or "stand-off" or abrupt about it; it meets the poet more than half-way, and lends itself to any sport of fancy or conceit in him with untiring complaisance. Its compass of

His "sevens"

His enjambed couplet.

<sup>1</sup> Here are some nearly pure sevens:—

See how every stream is dressed  
By her margin with the best  
*Of Flora's gifts: she seems glad*  
For such brooks such flowers she had.  
And the trees are quaintly tired  
With green buds, of all desired;  
And the hawthorn, every day,  
Spreads some little show of May.  
See the primrose sweetly sit  
By the much-loved violet, etc.

where only l. 3 has not made up its mind, as it easily might, to be eight or seven.

melody is, of course, far greater than that of its rival: only a very bad poet indeed can be monotonous in it. Adroitly managed, it combines the advantages and powers of the stanza with those of the couplet, and even both with those of the blank verse paragraph to no small extent. For description it has no peer, inasmuch as it escapes the over-*vignetted* effect of the stanza, and the sharp creases, as of a picture folded and not rolled, that are inseparable from the stopped distich. And for the poetry of 1600-1650, with its prodigality of richly figured and coloured conceit—the description, as it were, of the intellect,—it is equally efficacious.<sup>1</sup>

But in the very enumeration of these advantages and charms the suggestion of the other side must be clear to all but dullest wits. Enchantresses are extremely nice persons at times; but they are always dangerous. And this enchantress is notoriously the very Circe of her kind. Ulysses can master her, and perhaps Ulysses is rather unwise if he ever goes away from her to her precise and orderly rival with the everlasting machine-work. But then everybody is not Ulysses. Most of her lovers get pretty soon flustered with the cup of her enchantments, and some of them even undergo the further transformation.

Browne is not Ulysses; but neither is he Gryll. The most remarkable effect of the Circean spells upon him is that glanced at above, and noticeable in almost all practitioners of this form, except (I should say, though some would not) the late Mr. William Morris. There is

<sup>1</sup> Here is a passage taken, as I always prefer to do, almost at random :—

It chanced one morn, clad in a robe of grey,  
And blushing oft, as rising to betray,  
Enticed this lovely maiden from her bed  
(So when the roses have discovered  
Their taintless beauties, flies the early bee  
About the winding alleys merrily)  
Into the wood, and 'twas her usual sport,  
Sitting where most harmonious birds resort,  
To imitate their warbling in Aprill,  
Wrought by the hand of Pan, which she did fill  
Half full of water :

The actual verse-sentence does not end for another half-dozen lines.

no very cogent reason why the liberty of enjambment in verse should lead to confusion in narrative and exposition. After all, whether you give to a particular subdivision of your subject twenty lines in a bundle of ten pairs, or in batches of seven and thirteen, it need not much matter to the conduct of the subject itself. But in practice it does. *Endymion* is bad enough in this respect: the best way is to keep fast hold of Cynthia's hand or waist, and never mind where she is taking you. But its originals leave it far behind. I have found it my duty to make a regular argument of Chamberlayne's *Pharonnida*; and this duty has not been imposed upon me in regard to *Britannia's Pastorals*, so that I am not quite in the same position with regard to the two. But from reading the *Pastorals* more than once or twice, I should say that they, although the shorter, would be in some ways the harder to reduce to *précis*. And much the same is the case with the minor poems of the same class and measure, especially *Thealma* and *Clearchus*. The contagion of breathlessness and "promiscuousness" seems to spread from the structure of the verse to that of the story. Yet, when one reads such a passage as Wither's "Alresford Pool," which will be given presently, or any one of scores in Browne, such as that which was given above, it is very hard to quarrel with the measure or the method. One floats on away, afar, with such pleasant aimlessness, and in such an agreeable country! It is a little relaxing perhaps. The charms of the South and of the West are in it. But there are times when one does not exactly consider the north-easter the only "wind of God"—who indeed, according to the more orthodox view, created them all.

Browne, however, by no means confined himself to this one metrical mistress. The *Pastorals* themselves are interspersed with lyrical admixtures of very varied kinds—octosyllables and heptasyllables (though fewer of these) and stanzas of all sorts,<sup>1</sup> and the minor poems swell the

<sup>1</sup> The reader will find in Mr. Gordon Goodwin's edition of Browne (London, two vols., 1894) abundant examples, from the wasp-waisted kind, ii. 43 (which is mainly decasyllabic, but contracts itself in the middle), to very

tale of variety. But perhaps the best place of all for Browne's power in irregular metres is the *Inner Temple Masque*, with its often-quoted and extremely beautiful lyrical overture—

Steer hither, steer your wingèd pines,

the completion of which does not come for some time in the original; and with a large choice of other lyrical metres, including one of those fantasticalities rather favoured by the Elizabethans older and younger—an "Echo Song." In fact, this later but really "pleasant Willy" is a very good example of the way in which his master had in his own words "taught all the woods to answer, and their echoes ring" to tunes and times never imagined before.

Wither. His almost inseparable companion in literary history, Wither, who was actually his friend, has very much less variety of accomplishment and much volume of actually accomplished verse; but for this very reason his native woodnote strikes, and, when it was attended to, always has struck, hearers and readers almost more forcibly. Wither illustrated both his pluck and his silliness by collecting<sup>1</sup> all his good poems under the name of *Juvenilia* when he was nearly thirty-five, and publishing hardly anything that was not rubbish later. In fact, out of *The Hymns and Songs of the Church* and *Hallelujah*, it is quite in vain to search the vast desert of his later work for anything good; and the samples of good hymn-metre and phrase in these two<sup>2</sup> are not abundant. Even the *Juvenilia* themselves contain plenty of warning both of what was to come and of what was not. The whole mass of the satires is worthless prosodic-

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beautiful things like "Glide soft, ye silver floods," ii. 96. Note i. 225, for closed couplet, and "Shall I tell you whom I love?" i. 235, where the honey of the period is admirably combed. Note also i. 285, "As new-born babes," which is especially redolent of Spenser. In fact, all these pieces vividly recall *The Shepherd's Kalendar* with another generation of practice added. *The Shepherd's Pipe* invites this remembrance still more candidly.

<sup>1</sup> The Spenser Society's reprints in the originals must be consulted by those who want all the chaff as well as all the corn. The latter is to be found almost completely in Mr. Arber's *English Garner*.

<sup>2</sup> To be found in the *Library of Old Authors*, ed. Farr (two vols., London, 1856-57).

ally, Wither's rather languid, if not exactly limp couplet, being quite unfitted for use as whip-lash, and not knowing, as Browne's did, how to exchange itself for something else. Nor is it much good in his other pieces for any purpose save description, where, however, it achieves mild triumphs. The already-mentioned picture of Alresford Pool<sup>1</sup> I must always regard as one of the most perfect things of its kind in English, if not in any language. The actual place, it is true, is very pretty; and nobody would ever think that it is anything but a natural lake, though as a matter of fact it is the work of one of the benighted priests of the slothful and ignorant Middle Ages, intended (and for ages serving) as an instrument of public utility and health. But Wither has heightened its beauty a little, though quite in a legitimate and Turneresque manner, and has rendered the whole thing magisterially. It would be impossible to suit the texture and colour of the metrical garment more perfectly to the body of the picture.

His longer  
couplet in  
"Alresford  
Pool."

Still there is no doubt that it is not the decasyllabic His shorter.  
couplet, enjambed or other, which gives Wither his shrine in the west front of the Church of St. Prosodia, and almost entitles him to a special chapel or chantry inside. His claims rest on the shorter distich, which is so faithful to the trochaic cadence and the seven-syllable norm that,

<sup>1</sup> For pleasant was that Pool; and near it then  
Was neither rotten marsh nor boggy fen;  
It was not overgrown with boisterous sedge,  
Nor grew there rudely, then, along the edge  
A bending willow, nor a prickly bush,  
Nor broad-leaved flag, nor reed, nor knotty rush.  
But here, well ordered, was a grove with bowers;  
There, grassy plots set round about with flowers.  
Here you might, through the water, see the land  
Appear strewed o'er with white or yellow sand.  
Yon, deeper was it; and the wind, by whiffs,  
Would make it rise and wash the little cliffs;  
On which, oft pluming, sate unfrightened then  
The gagging wild goose and the snow-white swan,  
With all those flocks of fowl which, to this day,  
Upon these quiet waters breed and play.

The prosodic note of this (which no one perhaps has later caught so well as Mr. William Morris) is not enjambment, so much as a varied valuing of pause and clause, which *distributes* the harmony otherwise than merely by couplets.

although it has the very same line which more generally serves as a change for the iambic octosyllable, and is probably a mere derivative therefrom, seems in such examples as these, with the patronage of Shakespeare before and over it, almost to deserve a separate establishment and title.<sup>1</sup> The name just mentioned, and others mentioned before, would of themselves negative any idea of regarding Wither as the chief practitioner of this. But he may be the most representative without being the chief, and I think he is. When he tries others, as in some of the "Sonnets" of *Philarete*, he is at best unimportant; but when he returns to this, either arranged simply (and best so), or alternately rhymed, or set in stanza form, he rises at once. It is his mother-metre: he cannot touch it without deriving strength and inspiration from the touch. Even here, of course, he cannot conquer his nature, and put in the light ringing measure the fire as well as light of Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or the *Pericles* choruses, the quintessenced elixir of Fletcher or of Herrick. His, even more than Browne's, is really a "shepherd's pipe," the ideal utterance of the impossible but agreeable person with crooks and garlands, in the equally impossible but agreeable country in which ribbons never grow faded and sheep are always fresh from the washing. Yet he does it with the least possible touch of artificiality. Wither is no Watteau: he may not have so much art, but he has much less flagrant artifice. And his prosody at this time is just what it ought to be to suit Arcadia. In the dreary dotages of his later years he returned almost exclusively to the decasyllabic couplet.

A few remarks on the prosody of two other poets in

<sup>1</sup> One example is hardly better than another, though one may contain an individually happier phrase than another. This (though it has none such) will do:—

Then shall cowardly Despair  
Let the most unblemished fair,  
For default of some poor art  
Which her favour may impart,  
And the sweetest Beauty fade  
That was ever born or made?  
Shall, of all the fair ones, she  
Only so unhappy be

As to live in such a time,  
In so rude, so dull a clime,  
Where no spirit can ascend  
High enough to apprehend  
Her unprized excellence,  
Which lies hid from common sense?  
Never shall a stain so vile  
Blemish this, our Poet's Isle.

this period who have no special prosodic individuality may be added for completeness, and put together for convenience. The actual verse of Sylvester<sup>1</sup>—perhaps the best read (as Englisher of “Bartas”) of any English poet during the first half of the seventeenth century—is by no means so stiff as the close and prim laurel wreath, the palisading effrontery of the ruff, and the severely buckrammed doublet of his portrait might suggest. In fact, it is rather in diction than in versification that Sylvester is grotesque; and it is noteworthy that his verse is freest and most melodious in his rather frequent original insertions. He is, however, a strict elider and apostrophator: and the couplet which he chiefly uses is of the indeterminate Draytonian sort, ready to take either branch of the Y by turns, but not taking either very decidedly. In wholly original pieces he gives himself more licence; and is the better for it. In fact, Sylvester is one of those curious persons who give one the idea that they might have been better poets than they were: an effect at least more gracious than that produced by the other class, of whom Beattie is an excellent example—who would have been better poets, if they could. Basse, who has had late admission<sup>2</sup> to the Rules of the Spenserian Sanctuary, shows at his prosodic best in the half mock-heroic poem on the Boarstall Walnut Tree (where his rhyme-royal rather reminds one of Kynaston’s later experiment in *Leoline and Sydanis*). Indeed, this mixed mode seems to have been his forte, though he practised it little. The two songs “The Hunter’s Song” and “Tom-a-Bedlam” are not contemptible; and his “Sword and Buckler”—a defence of the irregular profession (as it has been called) of gentleman serving-man—adopts the sixain not clumsily. The various stanzas of his more serious poems are respectable but undistinguished.

A subject of considerable interest and importance, connecting itself with something that we saw formerly, but capable of being sufficiently handled in short space,

Sylvester and  
Basse.

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Grosart, “Chertsey Worthies Library,” printed for private circulation, two vols., 1880.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Mr. Warwick Bond, who edited him (London, 1893).

The Scottish  
Jacobians—  
Ayton, Ker,  
and Hannay.

the sudden spondees of the "bob" and the iambic close. It is with the trochee that Donne does most of his feats here, and unless he wrote—

Thou sent'st me late a heart was crowned,<sup>1</sup>

(of which I think far higher than some seem to do) I do not know that he has any of the greatest triumph of iambic "C.M." But his eights, as in "O! do not die, for I shall hate,"<sup>2</sup> are wonderful past all whooping. He has a marvellously sustained six-line stanza (6, 10, 8, 8, 10, 6 *ababcc*), where, though the rhyme order is the same as in the most usual sixain, the difference of line-lengths creates an entirely new music; lighter things like "The Message," much twisted and "bobbed," and that astounding "Ecstasy," also in eights or long measure, where, perhaps, the boldest line with which poet ever dared fools—

And we said nothing all the day,

occurs, and justifies itself.

But one returns, somehow, to the pieces where most of the lines are decasyllabic, such as "The Dream" and

Teach me to hear mermaids singing,  
Or to keep off envy's stinging,  
And find  
What wind  
Serves to advance an honest mind.

<sup>1</sup> There are many MS. versions of this, which is sometimes ascribed to Sir Robert Ayton :—

Thou sent'st me late a heart was crowned,  
I took it to be thine;  
But when I saw it had a wound,  
I knew that heart was mine.

A bounty of a strange conceit!  
To send mine own to me,  
And send it in a worse estate  
Than when it came to thee.

Ben or Donne for many ducats!

<sup>2</sup> O! do not die, for I shall hate  
All women so, when thou art gone,  
That thee I shall not celebrate  
When I remember thou wast one.



"Love's Deity," so odd is the effect of contrast with the others, as if the poet were doing it on purpose, and saying to Ben, "Oh! you think I deserve hanging, do you? Keep accent in this way, if even *you* can!" As for the famous "Funeral," it even ventures the fourteener, and vindicates its audacity in a wreath of verse as "subtle" as that which it celebrates. While if he wrote "Absence," as I feel pretty certain that he did, he has made an almost unique special mould for his thought.<sup>1</sup> We often say to ourselves how admirably the sense and sound suit each other in this or that poem. But here I could almost say that no other sound could possibly suit *this* sense—that we should not "enjoy but miss" it, if a foot were changed. •

But I must recall the reader and myself from enjoyment—it was very hard to leave off tapping this nectar—to the sober prosodic fact that the author of most of these things certainly, of all possibly, was also the author of the jolting monstrosities above cited. Many theories—my own of a rather irresponsible experiment, Mr. Melton's of "arsis-thesis variations," a dozen others—may be brought in to account for the contrast. One thing, however, is not theory but fact, that the contrast is *there*. In other words, it was possible for the same man to produce perfect harmony in one set of metres, almost perfect cacophony in others. In yet other words, Spenser's work was not quite done. And before Donne died, the

<sup>1</sup> By Absence this good means I gain  
That I can catch her,  
Where none can watch her,  
In some close corner of my brain.  
There I embrace and kiss her,  
And so I both enjoy and miss her.

The reading of this last line is that of the *Poetical Rhapsody*, and I think the most Donnish.

And so enjoy her and none miss her,

or "while none miss her," as some MSS. have it, is possible.

And so enjoy her and so miss her,

another MS. form, is feebler.

fact that it was not quite done was shown, not merely in the older form of the couplet, but in the newer of blank verse. So somebody had to do something more ; and at the beginning of the next Book we shall see how Milton came and did it.

## CHAPTER V

### PROSODISTS

A new subject of study—The attraction of classical metres—Note on Hawes's *Example of Virtue*—The "craze" for them in English—Ascham—The contempt of rhyme—Freaks of the craze—Drant—Harvey and Spenser—Stanyhurst—"Quantity"—Sidney's silence—Webbe—Nash—Puttenham—Campion's *Observations*—Daniel's *Defence*—*The Mirror for Magistrates* once more—Lesson of its prosodic freaks—Of the prose discussions—Of its later editions—Gascoigne's *Notes of Instruction*—Note on King James's *Rewlis and Cautelis*—Chapman, Jonson, Drayton.

WE have now for the first time, according to the scheme of this Book as originally laid down, to turn, at least partially, from prosody as a matter of practice to prosody as a matter of theory.<sup>1</sup> A certain amount of the contents of this chapter belongs, as was freely confessed, to the last period of the last volume, and was slightly handled there by anticipation ; but had it been dealt with then in detail it must have been severed from its natural complement, and left in a very unsatisfactory condition. Moreover, it would not have been possible to mark, as it was desired to mark, the division between the unconscious and the conscious dispensations of English prosody. Henceforward, though everything that every poet does (*vide* Preface) will still not be consciously done in obedience to

A new subject  
of study.

<sup>1</sup> I may as well at once refer, though I shall have to do so again and again, more specially than in this chapter, to the excellent contributions of Mr. T. S. Omond to the history, bibliography, and discussion of this part of the subject. The chief places of his work are *A Study of Metre* (London, 1903), and *English Metrists*, two parts supplementary to each other (Tunbridge Wells, 1903, and London, 1907).

rule, or in carrying out of principle, prosodic inquiry will always, as a matter of fact and time, if not always in the same persons, accompany prosodic accomplishment; and the last chapters of each of our Books will, it is hoped, represent this concomitance not inappropriately. But the first of them must begin with a fuller account (it was glanced at before<sup>1</sup>) of the curious measles or distemper which, dangerously but not by any means without beneficial results, affected English poetry to some extent, and English prosodic study to a much greater, for more than half a century.

The attraction  
of classical  
metres.

That the phenomenon itself<sup>2</sup> was a natural and necessary consequence of the general drift of the Renaissance, needs no setting forth here; that the disease (if we may so call it) attacked all Europe, is a simple historic fact. But the morbid and dangerous aspect of it was particularly threatening in England; and the fact connects itself directly with the general history which we have been telling. In no literary country of Europe (for in Germany it was a case of arrested development, not of sudden disorganisation and apparent decay) had the machinery of poetry gone so wrong as in England. The Italians were still in their greatest poetical age, and the Spaniards were approaching it. In France there had been something of a falling off in poetic spirit, though poets like Charles d'Orléans and Villon had still borne the torch high; and formal perfection had been rather over-elaborated and mis-elaborated than lost. But in England, as we have seen, practical prosody had to a great extent "gone paralytic"; and though it was recovering, the fruits of recovery were still not very great, and were not to be so for another generation.

The persons to whom the new critical nîsus, so long dormant in Europe, was now extending from Italy, the

<sup>1</sup> Book iv. chapter ii. "The Turn of the Tide: Classical Influence."

<sup>2</sup> It should not be necessary to point out at any great length that we are dealing here only with the strictly *prosodic* influence of the classics. Their influence in other ways was, of course, enormous; though it may have been exaggerated or mistaken in some details, it cannot be denied or belittled as a whole. But it is not for us.

place of its resurrection, had before them not merely this paralysis of the prosodic vernacular in all its deformity, but also the salvage of ancient literature in all its beauty. They found Greek and Latin poetry pervaded with an ordered vigour of prosodic arrangement, such as has never been surpassed. In these new-old poets they found nothing (practically nothing) of that rhyme which was omnipresent in mediæval poetry; and they found a mathematical system of quantitative arrangement which apparently left nothing to desire, either in system beforehand or in result afterwards.

Small blame to them, then, if, especially at a time when, as we have seen, the very pronunciation and accentuation of English<sup>1</sup> were unsettled and uncertain, they fell into the usual fallacy of confounding coexistence with causation, and deciding that the orderly harmony of writers like Virgil was *due to* the presence of certain metres and the absence of rhyme, that the discord of writers like Hawes<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I am ashamed to say that I was not aware, when I wrote the note on p. Note on 235 of vol. i., that Mr. Arber had at last actually printed his transcript of Hawes's *The Example of Virtue* at the end of his *Dunbar Anthology* (Oxford, 1901). *Example of Virtue* a place where one may be excused for not looking for it, though it actually includes one-third of the volume. Gratitude to him for making accessible what had been so long hidden in the Pepysian and Britwell libraries, and for filling in a gap of our knowledge, need not be in the least affected by the fact that the poem is one of the very dullest of fifteenth-century allegories, presenting nothing but a series of commonplaces, arranged with extraordinary clumsiness, and inferior to the *Pastime of Pleasure* in every conceivable respect —except that it is much shorter. This inferiority is nowhere more conspicuous than in our special province. The *Pastime* often plays havoc with prosody; the *Example* shows scarcely anything but an utter inability to manage metre at all. A very large proportion of its more than three hundred rhyme-royal stanzas conclude with frankly octosyllabic couplets.

And tarry I did there by long space,  
Till that I saw before my face,

in stanza 4 of the body of the text, is followed by

All wildness, I will be your guide  
That ye to frailty shall not slide,

in the next, and by

For in what place I am exiled  
They be with sin full oft defiled,

in the seventh. And so constantly. Occasionally the poet seems to be in a state of complete uncertainty which of his master Lydgate's two favourite measures, rhyme-royal and octosyllabic couplet, he is writing, as here (stanza 81)—

and Skelton was *due* to the absence of metrical quantity and the presence of rhyme. Others before them, and abroad, had done or were doing the same thing with less excuse; and in so doing were providing more excuse still for the English innovators. That there was no intentional treason to their native tongue is, in the case of men like Ascham, certain and demonstrable; in the case of almost all, probable if not proved. There seems to have been in England little or nothing of the strange delusion which in Italy made even men so learned and sensible as Lilius Giraldus despise the vulgar tongue; and though there *was* something of that distrust of it which survived as late as Bacon—though there were Little-faiths who, as he did, thought that these weak and infantine dialects had no chance with the secular strength of Latin—this very distrust took for the most part the generous form of wishing to strengthen the weakling by as much borrowing from antiquity as might be possible. The immediate and direct results of the movement were, in all but infinitesimal proportion, almost unconscionably absurd, and it might have done ruinous harm. But, as a matter of fact, it did next to none; and in certain ways it did some good.

The "craze"  
for them in  
English—  
Ascham.

The history of the craze has received a good deal of attention in recent times and is fairly well known,<sup>1</sup> though

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And if a man be never so wise,  
Withouten me he getteth none utterance.  
Wherefore his wisdom may not suffice  
All only, without mine allegiance;  
For I by right must needs enhance  
A low-born man to a high degree,  
If that he will be ruled by me.

Speaking generally, the stanzas are merely bundles of seven-rhymed verses, the lengths of which are not so much varied as taken at random, without the slightest consideration what they are. In fact, this long-expected poem, the latest that has come under my notice, is the extreme example of the Period of Staggers. It is childish to put the blame on Wynkyn de Worde and his compositors. They may have shared the sin; they may very probably have been unconscious of it; they cannot have committed it wholly.

<sup>1</sup> A complete bibliography of the history and criticism of Elizabethan literature would be needed to do justice to the subject. Mr. Gregory Smith's *Elizabethan Critical Essays* (Oxford, 2 vols., 1904) is the best single source for texts. For a study of the special matter (including some writers and passages whom and which I have not thought it necessary to notice) see the first part of Mr. Omond's *English Metrists*, as above.

not in its earliest documents. Curiously enough it seems to have arisen at Cambridge, and to have chiefly prevailed among Cambridge men; while Daniel, who finally smashed it in one of the most admirable small critical tractates in all literature, was an Oxonian. But that justification which we have already allowed to it extends to its nurses and fosterers, after a sort at least. It appears to have been an offshoot of the literary and linguistic activity, especially in relation to Greek, which Erasmus, learning it from Oxford, taught at Cambridge and developed there. It has even been thought by sober and sensible judges, that Ascham, from whom we have the earliest accounts and advocacies of it, may have had rather more to do with its actual inception and codification than either the earlier Bishop Thomas Watson, to whom he attributes the original production of an appallingly bad specimen in the kind,<sup>1</sup> or the later Archdeacon Drant, whom Spenser has established for us as the law-giver of this very scrubby Parnassus. But Watson's verse is interesting, and I do not myself quite sympathise with the desire which some have shown to dethrone or disbench or gibbet (for all these images present themselves in quite orderly turn) Drant.

It is curious, if not unusual, that the earliest manifesto on the subject shows at once the weak sides of the new proposal. Ascham in *The Schoolmaster* is very positive about the matter, and abuses rhyme<sup>2</sup> with all the rather hollow swagger of Renaissance scholarship, which sits clumsily enough on a good-natured Englishman. But "rude beggarly rhyming," "barbarous and rude rhyming,"

The contempt  
of rhyme.

<sup>1</sup> It may be repeated, though given in vol. i.—

All travellers do gladly report great praise of Ulysses,  
For that he knew many men's manners and saw many cities.

And truly these first English hexameters were justified of most of their children—the exceptions, as we shall see when we come to them, being no exceptions at all. Indeed, even Ascham, though in the place where he quotes them he celebrates their "right quantity of syllables and true order of versifying" (*Schoolmaster*, ed. Arber, p. 73), elsewhere (pp. 145, 146) lets slip the words "hobble" and "stumble" on the subject. *V. inf.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ed. et loc. cit.*

"foul wrong way," etc., prove just nothing at all; and his positive arguments (not to mention certain damaging admissions) themselves prove the "wrong way." He slips on his own ground by stigmatising the metre of Terence and Plautus as "very mean and not to be followed." He asserts that rhyming was first brought into Italy by Goths and Huns—of which, as to the Goths there is evidence the other way, and as to the Huns no evidence at all. His appeal to Quintilian is so absolutely absurd that we almost suspect Queen Elizabeth's good tutor of having a simpleton side to him. What good rhyming poetry—what rhyme at all except awkward jingles like Cicero's—had Quintilian before him?

But the admissions are, after all, the main thing. "Indeed, our English tongue, having in use chiefly words of one syllable which are commonly long, doth not well receive the nature of *Carmen Heroicum*, because *dactylus*, the aptest foot for that verse, containing one long and two short, is seldom therefore found in English, and doth rather stumble than stand in *monosyllabis*." Again, "*Carmen Exametrum* doth rather trot and hobble than run smoothly in our English tongue." After which he finds fault, not merely with Surrey's blank verse in English, but with that of Gonsalvo Perez in Spanish, and with the Italians generally for not versifying "true." This, of course, simply means, for versifying without quantity—a charge met and utterly refuted by the simple observation that the quantity of one language is not necessarily—is not even probably—the quantity of another.

Freaks of the  
craze

This atmosphere of confusion and muddlement envelops almost all those who commit whoredom with this enchantress, except Stanyhurst partially, and Campion in a certain sense wholly. The present day has nothing to reproach them with in respect of confusing accent and quantity, and mistaking the relation between the two even when they are not confused: but they do both with a singular obtuseness. Almost from the first, as we see from the correspondence of Spenser and Harvey on the subject, there were two schools of "new versifiers"—



the less thorough-going, and the more. The former, who have always supplied the majority of English hexametrists, and who have written the only tolerable English hexameters, accepted the ordinary pronunciation of English as far as it was settled in their day, and attempted to get hexametrical or elegiac rhythm out of this. The others threw the whole vocalisation of the English tongue overboard, and endeavoured to introduce classical (or rather Latin) rules of quantification for individual syllables, so that, for instance, the second syllable of "carpenter" was made "long by position." Nearly all again broke down over the great crux of the "common" syllable, which, rare in Latin, more common in Greek, is the rule rather than the exception in English. And few had the method of the half-madman Stanyhurst, who methodically, however madly, writes "thee" for the article when he wants to make it long, and keeps the ordinary spelling when he wants it short.

The results of all this meddling and muddling in verse—to give it that title by the courtesy of Irony—are admitted by almost everybody to be among the most absurd things in literature. The admission of Ascham, a Balaam reversed, still stands against them—they "hobble and stumble" generally; at the best they "trot" and bump. The great original of Watson, which we have quoted from Ascham, is a miserable thing enough; but it is tolerable beside the grotesque (and perhaps in part intentionally burlesque) doggerel of Harvey, and the frantic gibberish of Stanyhurst.<sup>1</sup> Even in iambics—as nearly indigenous as any English foot—and even in the hands of such a poet as Spenser, the ungainly shamble of this truly "unhappy verse" curiously "witnesses" its writer's "unhappy state." And the proceeding never got out of its suggestion of marrow-bones and cleavers and salt-box as accompanying instruments, till Campion practically gave the whole case away by abandoning classical *metres* altogether, and advocating unrhymed lyric of a more or less pure English pattern. We must, however, as in

<sup>1</sup> See the examples quoted in vol. i. p. 319.

duty bound, go through the follies of its advocates and practitioners a little more definitely.

Ascham's own remarks on what we shall not imitate him by calling his "foul wrong way" were, as we have seen, confined to generalities, and the examples which he gives, probably or certainly of his own making, in *Toxophilus*<sup>1</sup> are of no special interest, though they illustrate his own frank admission of the hobbling of the spavined jade, with which he wished to corrupt our English stud. But the idea was eagerly caught up from him and from Watson in their own University and College; and a member of the latter, Thomas Drant, appears to have drafted a complete set of Rules on the subject. I cannot quite agree with my friend Professor Gregory Smith in doubting whether these were ever committed to writing—that construction not seeming to me compatible with the remarks of Spenser and Harvey, to which we shall come next. But it is certain that, as yet, no trace of them in formal state has been discovered. Drant died in 1578, a year or two before this correspondence, and as there is no allusion to him in *The Schoolmaster*, which was published after Ascham's death in 1568, we have a clear decade in which Drant may have devoted himself to the subject. But we learn from Spenser that, before the winter of 1579-1580, Sidney and Dyer, and the coterie they called their Areopagus, had taken up the matter solemnly, proclaimed (happily without anybody obeying them) the surceasing of rhyme, prescribed laws and rules of quantities and the like. *Propter*, or at least *post quod*, it appears that Spenser himself "is more in love with versifying" (which word these sectaries always use in their shibboleth sense) than with "rhyming."

Harvey and  
Spenser.

So also, it seems, was Harvey; but not according to the Drantian or Areopagite way. Spenser complains gently that his friend and Mentor once or twice "makes breach"

<sup>1</sup> Such as

Eight good shafts have I shot sith I came, each one with a fork-head.

*Tox.*, ed. Arber, p. 135.

in Master Drant's rules, sending him that "unhappy verse" of his own. Harvey, of course, was not going to stand this; and though very complimentary in general to Spenser, hits some blots in the trimeters, and then proceeds to scold at the Drantian code, which he himself "neither saw nor heard before," and therefore "will neither praise nor dispraise." Still he speaks handsomely of Drant. All this is vague enough: though that "the rules" actually existed is surely clear from a passage in Spenser's rejoinder, where he asks for Harvey's own rules. Everybody, however, appears (not without some reason) to have been shy of *litera scripta* in the matter; for Harvey in reply thinks he had better "consult with his pillow" before he gives them. But he then says some sensible things—as that before you can get artificial prosody into good order, you must agree upon one and the same orthography, which must itself be conformable to "natural" prosody, that is, of course, pronunciation. "*Interim*" he "dare give no precepts." But he would gladly learn why in one of Spenser's examples, "the," "ye," "he" being short, "me" should be long, etc. And he declines the authority of "five hundred Master Drants" to make *carpenter* "longer than God and his English people have made him," whence it would appear that one of the rules was strict "quantity by position." On which, and on things connected with it, he speaks very good sense indeed.

The most curious of all utterances on this matter is Stanyhurst. Stanyhurst's.<sup>1</sup> The modern reader who knows anything about him is apt, not quite justifiably, to regard this respectable Irish gentleman and scholar as merely a lunatic. And however thoroughly one may have acquainted oneself with the circumstances of the case, it is still very difficult to realise how any one, *not* a lunatic, can have ever put to paper first, and then committed to print, stuff which looks like the utterances of a schoolboy, to whom some benevolent but injudicious uncle had given too

<sup>1</sup> In the Dedications to Lord Dunsany (and the Learned Reader) of his translation of the *Aeneid* (1582), reprinted by Mr. Arber in No. 10 of the *English Scholar's Library* (London, 1880). To be found, like other things here quoted, in Mr. Gregory Smith's book.

much champagne, and who should have been simultaneously furnished with a glossary of the most out-of-the-way words in the English language, and permission to spell them as he (and the champagne) pleased.<sup>1</sup> But as regards his prosody Stanyhurst was perfectly sober. He knew that he would be accused by "the meaner clerks"<sup>2</sup> of "making what word he chose short or long." He insists that every foot, every word, every syllable, yea, every letter is to be observed. And then he comes to details. He objects to the "curious Priscianists" who are stiffly tied to ordinances of the Latins, remarking, justly enough, that the Latins had tied their own hands quite sufficiently with Greek chains, so that we need not bind double fetters still more tightly on ourselves. *Breviter* in Latin is short; *briefly* in English is long. It is *orātor* in Latin, *orator* in English; and so forth. So far so good; but from this point he seems to deviate into one of the usual muddles between accent and quantity as if they were identical, instead of standing to each other sometimes in the relation of cause and effect, sometimes not, but never actually losing their individuality.

He seems to have understood—though he rather refers to it as granted than definitely states it—the rule that in English the accent constantly tends backwards, and (as far as possible) to the first syllable of the word. But he applies this much too rigidly; and makes his mistake worse by his confusion of accent and quantity as aforesaid. "Honour," he says, "in English is short as with the Latins, yet 'dishonour' must be long by the former maxim; [What former maxim? We find none except an implication in the passage about "Orator," etc.] which is contrary to another ground of the Latins whereby they prescribe that the primitive and derivative, the simple and compound, be of one quantity. . . ." "Mother" may be long (he spells it "moother"), yet "grandmother" must be short; "buckler" long, yet "swashbuckler" is

<sup>1</sup> If this seem extravagant, the person to whom it so seems is requested to open any page of the actual translation; or even to refer to the specimen in the last volume.

<sup>2</sup> I beg his pardon, "thee meaner clarkcs."

short. "And albeit that word be long by position, yet doubtless the natural dialect of English will not allow of that rule in middle syllables." He would, however, very shrewdly and correctly, have the word "and" made common. He goes so far as to charge those with ignorance who say "impérative" and "orthógraphy," denying this to be the true "English" pronunciation.

To pick up the several arbitrarinesses and contradictions of this would be superfluous. They are all too usual in English prosodic writings; and I daresay the present book is not free from them. But we may single out the remark upon "honour." It is very difficult even to be certain what he means by "dishonour" being long, if "honour" is short. It is almost stranger that his very sensible observation on "skyward"<sup>1</sup> did not suggest itself to him on "swashbuckler." But on the whole, what has been said already covers the situation. He cannot rise to the conception of English as of a language in which pure vowel sound has nothing *exclusively* to do with the "quantity"—the metrical capacity—of syllables;<sup>2</sup> in "Quantity." which "position" has nothing *necessarily* to do with this quantity, though there are cases in which it cannot be neglected; in which accent can *determine* or *entail*, though it may not *originate* or *constitute*, quantity; and in which a very large proportion of syllables are naturally indifferent or common, so that they can receive the quantifying stamp from accent itself in the general sense, from particular stress or emphasis, from position *in the verse*, and from not a few other things. His practice is of little use to us, because his apparently insane lingo—the result partly, as he himself tells us, of a desire to be different from his predecessor Phaer—can seldom be discarded sufficiently to enable us to judge his versification fairly. His theory is, perhaps, the least irrational of all its class; and the exposition of it is particularly valuable, because it preserves and emphasises for us that excessive *un-*

<sup>1</sup> "They are but compound words, that may be with good sense sundered."

<sup>2</sup> In other words, in which not all long syllables are made so by "long" vowel-sound.

*certainty*<sup>1</sup> of English pronunciation which lies at the root as well of these crazy experiments, as of the acquiescent dotage of the fifteenth century.

Sidney's  
silence.

Considering the part assigned to Sidney by Spenser in banning rhyme and blessing verse by edict of his Areopagus; considering the numerous experiments in the new kinds which the *Arcadia*<sup>2</sup> contains,—it may well seem, and has seemed, odd that there should be so little reference to the matter in the *Defence* or *Apology*. Perhaps we may hope that a slight practical taste of the thing was as sufficient for the author of *Astrophiel and Stella* as it was for his friend the author of *The Faerie Queene*—that “having been there” he knew better than to “go” again, finding it quite other than a little prosodic heaven. At the same time it is necessary to point out that the controversy raised by Gosson practically had nothing to do with mere prosody. At any rate the chief document of the earlier Elizabethan criticism for authorship, genius, and interest of almost all kinds, yields us practically nothing. Neither does Lodge touch the point, nor Fraunce, another member of the Sidneian circle and practitioner of “versing,” who brought himself a specially hard rap from the impatient ferule of Ben Jonson.<sup>3</sup> It is, however, otherwise with Mr. William Webbe, whose pretty well-known little *Discourse* leaves one doubtful whether to admire him for his amiable and not ill-guided enthusiasm, or to condemn him for his extraordinary lack of scholarship and knowledge generally, his hasty adoption of ill-considered opinions, and his ridiculous attempts in the new versification itself.

Webbe.

Webbe always reminds me of the man whom Thackeray imagined as thanking his host for that host's very best Lafite, and expressing approval of it, but going on to say,

<sup>1</sup> Let me protest, in passing, against the headlong credulity with which some good folk accept the supposition that Professor This or Dr. That has “proved” how, let us say, Shakespeare pronounced. *It is impossible, unless one rose from the dead*, to “prove” this; and though on detached points some *probability* can be reached, it must always be doubtful.

<sup>2</sup> On these *v. sup.* p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> “Abram Francis in his English Hexameters was a fool” (*Conv. with Drummond*).

"And now will you give me some of that capital ordinaire we had?" He *has* enthusiasm for "the New poet" (Spenser), but he does not hesitate to extol the bastard and heteroclite doggerel which that new poet had the sense to drop; and he produces some most egregious travesties of his own, in which the pure, if not perfect, music of the *Shepherd's Kalendar* is jangled and jarred from rhyme into "verse." He is also—Cambridge man and private tutor though he was—grossly ignorant of the simplest and best-known facts of ancient literature. With all this he means so well, and loves so much, that one cannot be very angry with him.

His *Preface* contains the now obligatory fling at "the rude multitude of rustical rhymers," etc., the necessity of driving "enormities" out of English poetry, and the attainment of perfect versifying by judiciously conditioned imitation of Greek and Latin. The actual "Discourse" begins with one of the also usual Renaissance celebrations of the venerable and divine origin of poetry, with plentiful citations from the ancients. Hence he passes to his first laudation of "our late famous English poet who wrote the *Shepherd's Calendar*," desiderating much and not unwisely, that vanished *English Poet*<sup>1</sup> of which "E. K." had spoken. More generalities follow, and a very rickety historical sketch of ancient poetry, supplemented by one—still more staggering—of English, which contains, among the matters most nearly touching us, a commendation of the *verse* of Lydgate, and the statement that "Piers Plowman" "was the first that observed the quantity of our verse without the curiosity of rhyme." As to this, the least that can be said is that it shows that Webbe used the word "quantity" without any precise idea whatsoever.

These citations and (generally) laudations in the other sense of poets and poetasters lead him up to fresh praise of the *Kalendar* and its author, as well as of Harvey, contrasted once more with the "rabble of rhyming," to which rabble, as it happens, Spenser, so far as he is a poet,

<sup>1</sup> Yet it is probable that this was merely a treatise of "versing," and that Spenser wisely destroyed it when he found out his mistake.

belongs, and belongs wholly in the *Kalendar* itself. After this he casts back once more—for short as the treatise is, it is mostly commonplace and verbiage—to the Renaissance common-form about delighting and profiting, “sage advice,” etc., with the old quotations from Terence and Ovid and Martial; cites very largely from Phaer’s *Virgil*; turns to Eclogue and the *Kalendar* yet again; and only when he has spent more than half his space devotes himself to a methodical discussion of rhyme and verse.

It has by this time struck him that it is rather inconsistent to praise Spenser and other “rhymers” to the skies, and to trample their prosody under his feet; and he speaks a little less disrespectfully of it. “I may not utterly disallow it,” he says, “lest I should seem to call in question,” etc. He is “content” (he had not been “content” at all) to esteem it as a thing “the perfection of which is very commendable,” only he would like it “bettered and made more artificial.” And then he proceeds to show how this may be done, borrowing a little dubious history from Ascham. He analyses the kinds of verse common at the time, truly enough pronouncing the fourteenner the most esteemed of all other, but recognising its resolution into common measure, and then more particularly dealing with the metres of the *Kalendar*.

Next, generalising and perhaps copying Gascoigne (*v. inf.*) he decides that “the natural course of most English verses seemeth to run on the old Iambic stroke,” and shows by example how, if you change the order, the verse will not do. This he turns into an argument (as it is, of course, *such* as it is) against rhyme, as occasionally inducing awkward metrical and other inversions. He does not, however, disdain to suggest a rhyming dictionary, and once more goes to his *Kalendar* for “words prettily turned” and wound up mutually together. But he at last proceeds to “the reformed kind of English verse,” gives a list of feet by their classical names, admits the difficulty of adjusting them to English, and then, after a very few more directions, ends with abundant (and very



bad) examples of his own, and general cautions on Poetry from Horace and others.

Not much criticism of this need be given, and we need Nash. say less of Nash's well-known and as well-deserved satire on Stanyhurst, because it does not turn on any question of principle, but merely on that eccentric Irishman's application of principles. Indeed, Nash speaks rather kindly of those similar but less harsh experiments of Fraunce, to which Jonson was to be decidedly, though more briefly hostile.

George Puttenham (*si* George and *si* Puttenham *y a*)<sup>1</sup> Puttenham. gave a whole third of the not inconsiderable treatise attributed to him to the subject of "Proportion in Poetry," by which he means Prosody: and no small proportion of this proportion is allotted to the new "versifying." Indeed, he starts with "feet," but for some time deals with ordinary metres, not fearing to include among them those things which excited the ever-increasing ire of neo-classic critics—"mathematical" forms in verse. But he allows four chapters (xiii. to xvi.) to "versing." Yet, when we come to the details, we find that odd shrinking away from the *propositum* which begins, as we pointed out, even in Ascham, and which is observable in all except methodic maniacs like Stanyhurst—to whom, by the way, Puttenham refers. The upshot of his chapters, when we come to examine them, is, after all, notwithstanding the other contradiction to be noticed, a matter of feet, not of metres. Now, it will certainly not be in this book that any one will come across a denial of classical *feet* in English. The question is, how far it is possible to combine these integers into representative classical *metres*. There's the rub; and this rub Puttenham (who frankly tells us at the very beginning that he has small love for "versifying") persistently shirks.

Still, he has a great deal of strictly prosodic matter,

<sup>1</sup> I merely insert this because of a certain kind of critic. It does not matter here one straw whether it is Puttenham, and if so whether it is George or Richard. But I have never thought Mr. Croft's arguments for the latter satisfactory. For these see his ed. of Eliot's *Governor* (London, 1883); for Puttenham's treatise, Professor Gregory Smith's collection, or Mr. Arber's separate issue (Birmingham, 1869).

despite the enormous space given to Figures of Speech and to the "rag-bag" of the subject. His Second Book, "Of Proportion Poetical," is, in fact, wholly devoted to prosody. "Poesy," he says, very properly, "is a skill to speak and write harmonically," and he deals with all the conditions indicated by the adverb—"Staff," "Measure," "Situation," etc. Staff and Measure require no long comment, though he is very copious on them; but it is curious that he prefers the sixain—perhaps the least effective of all—to stanzas both longer and shorter. He is also very minute on "measures," and insists on the importance of *cæsuræ*. He thinks (his argument on the subject being to me, at least, quite unintelligible) that we can have *no* "feet," and counts his lines merely by syllables; and he would, like many others to the present day, arrange these merely by cadences, themselves determined by accent. He is very particular about exact rhyme; and avails himself of elaborate diagrams to show its arrangement, and that of line-length. Also he lays himself open to the rather cheap ridicule of many generations since, by admitting and approving "proportion in figure"—the eggs, lozenges, etc., which so did shock Mr. Addison. For myself, I never could see that for the lighter kind of poetry—such things as have since been called *vers de société*—there was any greater harm in butterflies and bellows than in the artificial French forms; though no doubt—unlike these latter—they have a certain impertinence in wholly serious verse. On the whole, Puttenham is extremely interesting as showing that, at last, definite, even severe, attention was being given to form. If he seems sometimes to pay too much attention to the caddis and too little to the dragon-fly, why, these things will happen.

Puttenham's book appeared, though written earlier, in 1589. In the last decade of the sixteenth century the interest in "versing," as far as may be judged from extant writing about it, slackened—a few sputters of the wearisome and ill-mannered Harvey-and-Nash controversy being the chief exceptions. In this, Harvey characteristically

took to himself the title of "inventor of the English hexameter," a title which long stuck to him, though he certainly merited

Ni cet excès d'honneur ni cette indignité,

whichever way we may take it. But in almost the earliest years of the seventeenth it came to a head again, and was, in fact, finished, for the time, if not for all times, in the remarkable duel between Campion and Daniel.

The peculiarity—we cannot exactly say the singularity, Campion's Observations. for there is something of a match to it in Milton—of Campion's position as a decrifier of rhyme in theory, and a most exquisite master of it in practice, was not thoroughly obvious during the long eclipse of his orthodox lyrical work; but it was all along known to any one who read his generous and courteous antagonist's reply. And it cannot be too distinctly explained that his position, from the very first, is an almost entirely different one from that of all the previous "versers" and approvers of "versing"—Watson, Ascham, Drant, Spenser, Harvey, Webbe, Stanyhurst, and the rest. The warning which Ascham himself had uttered had been more than justified by the ludicrous failure of nearly two generations of hexametrists; and there is hardly anything left of the old attitude in Campion, except his railing at the "vulgar and unartificial custom" of rhyming—a little awkwardly addressed to Sackville, the author of some of the finest rhyme-royal in the language. He labours this point further in his first and second chapters, with the usual hopelessly illogical arguments from the non-practice of Greeks and Romans. But when he leaves off flourishes and comes to business, describing the six main feet, and (for what reason is not obvious) ranking spondee, tribrach, and anapæst, even in Greek and Latin, as "but servants to dactyl, trochee, and iamb," he says, "Only the heroical verse that is distinguished by the dactyl hath been oftentimes attempted in our English tongue, but with passing pitiful success; and no wonder, seeing it is an attempt altogether against the nature of our language." The English dactyl is

"ridiculous"; it is "unfit for use"—confessions which, of course, sweep the English hexameter away altogether. And he would have all English prosody based on iamb and trochee, though he admits, in a rather gingerly and reluctant fashion, trisyllabic substitution in certain places—tribrachs or dactyls, rarely anapæsts.

He next deals successively with "pure" and "licentiate" iambics—the latter allowing even tribrachs—with dimeter or "English march," of course unrhymed; then he proceeds to the "English trochaic" proper; the English elegiac, the English Sapphic, and Anacreontic.<sup>1</sup> He has thus described, with others which he adds, eight several kinds of English numbers, simple and compound, which he commends with an explosion at the "*fatness* of rhyme," and then concludes with a chapter on the quantity of English syllables. Here he sets forth, with the curious mixture of acuteness and prejudice which characterises the whole tractate, the increasing abundance of common syllables in Latin, Greek, and English respectively. He thinks that the true value is to be "measured chiefly by the accent"; but strangely pronounces the second syllable of "Trumpington" *naturally* long. And his special rules are as arbitrary, or nearly so, as Stanyhurst's. Perhaps it would be impossible to construct *a posteriori*, with all our advantages, a document more illustrative of the prosodic condition of the time than this. There is the surviving prejudice against rhyme—purely irrational, but explicable because of the association of *bad* verse with it, and because of the general and generous Renaissance admiration of the ancients. There is, further, the strongest revulsion from that badness of verse itself, and the desire to guard against its recurrence by a thorough examination of principles and a rather rigid formulation of practice. Perhaps there is something of that affectation of singularity and originality which is very human and not always—if it is sometimes—disgusting. There was no need—Campion had himself shown it, and was to show it amply—of limiting English verse to eight or eighty or eight hundred

<sup>1</sup> For more on all these, and examples of them, see last chapter.

kinds; and even one or two of his are very good, while all without exception would be improved by rhyme. But, on the other hand, and to set against all exaggeration, misdirected ingenuity, and positive mistake, there is the renunciation, once for all, of the preposterous new doggerel—more preposterous, if possible, and certainly more perverse, than the worst of the old, if not quite so paralytic—which men of learning, and to some extent of genius, had been trying to foist into English for the best part of half a century.

There was, however, mischief enough in the piece—especially in its irrational, unhistorical, and, in the best sense, unscientific contempt and refusal of rhyme—to require serious answer; and it could not have found a better answerer than Samuel Daniel. A great poet Daniel was not, but he was a good poet in his day and at his hour; he understood the sweetness and the gravity of English poetry; and, what was of special importance for the special purpose, he was almost an impeccable metrist and rhythmist, though he had not such a command of lyrical music as Campion himself. Moreover, he was really “a scholar and a gentleman”—one who knew, and who at the same time disdained to use his knowledge with the warty incivility or the extravagant gesticulation which were too common, and unfortunately have never been too uncommon. He had a famous case as well; and the result is one of the most agreeable things of its kind, and one of the most convincing.

There may seem to be a certain oddity<sup>1</sup> in the opening of his piece, wherein addressing Lord Pembroke, the nephew of one of the most formidable practitioners of “versing,” and in face of the chain of abuse of rhyme which we have sketched, he speaks of the use of it “having been held unquestionable.” Perhaps, as was suggested above, the craze had really “gone under” for some years, or the assumption of novelty may be rhetorical. At any rate, after a proper compliment to his opponent, which

<sup>1</sup> This oddity is even double; for Campion had, as noted, chosen for *his* dedicatee a great practitioner of rhyme itself.

would have annoyed Porthos and pleased Aramis, he takes up the most victorious and impregnable position of all by saying, "we could well have allowed of his numbers had he not disgraced our rhyme." Indeed, of the "numbers" themselves he says very little. But he founds his case at once upon the rock by saying, "Rhyme which both Custom and Nature do the most powerfully defend—Custom that is before all Law, Nature that is above all Art. Every language," this golden sentence proceeds, "hath her proper number or measure fitted to use and delight." And to this line he keeps throughout, never allowing himself to be tempted out of it. His history and derivations may be vulnerable: his argument is not. He dwells on the "added excellency" of rhyme; on the delight to the ear and the aid to the memory given by its echo of delightful report; on its actual universality. "If the Barbarian use it, then it shows that it sways the affection of the Barbarian; if civil nations practise it, it proves that it works upon the hearts of civil nations; if all, then that it hath a power in nature on all." There is not such an irresistible instance of common sense logically equipped as this in all the anti-rhymers from Ascham to Milton. "Ill customs," it is said, "ought to be left." "Prove the illness," he retorts. Why should we imitate the Greeks and Latins? As for rhyme being an impediment, it gives wings. And then he turns eloquently to the general "Ancient and Modern" question, not condemning the ancients, but once more asking *why* we should "yield our conquests captive to the authority of antiquity," alleging "the wonderful architecture of the state of England" as a parallel—and urging that we shall "best tend to perfection by going on in the course we are in."

But Daniel is far from laying himself open to the reproach of confining himself to safe generalities. He points out—and it is again crushing to the whole system of the versers—that "we must here imitate the Greeks and Latins, and yet we are here showed to disobey them," taught "to produce what they make short, and make short

what they produce." "Were it not better to hold to old custom than to be distracted with uncertain new Laws?" Is not the "iambic verse" that ancient one of five feet which hath ever been used? the "dimeter" half of this verse? And so with the rest. Therefore in these eight several kinds of numbers "we have only what was our own before, apparelled in foreign titles," so that had they come in their natural attire of rhyme we should never have suspected them as other. Then he exposes some of those crotchety inharmonies which we noted above. And thus, with some remarks on his own practice and a free allowance of blank verse in itself, he closes a tractate equally admirable for matter, arrangement, and (in every sense) "manner."

So far as we know, Campion never attempted to "duply"; and he was very well advised not to do so; while he went on with rhymed numbers, in which he was even better advised. And so the whole thing vanished away like Spenser's Orgoglio, or better still perhaps his false Florimel, when the true beauty was set beside her. Even in that curious splurt of Milton's, to which we shall come in its proper place, there is no hint of "versing" in the Ascham-Harvey or even the Campion sense, though there is an echo of the baseless abuse of rhyme. A few remarks may be made in the Interchapter on the whole thing in this phase of it, though a complete discussion of the English hexameter must still be postponed. Meanwhile we have to return. Most of the Elizabethan prosodists have been mentioned, for most concerned themselves with the craze. But some did not; and some points in those already mentioned, not affecting this craze, may be handled.

And here we may, in the first place, recur with advantage to a book which was noticed to some extent in the last volume, but which the relegation of the prosodic studies of the period to this necessarily reintroduces. I have long been acquainted with *The Mirror for Magistrates* "after a sort," by incursions and prospecting expeditions in public libraries. But I knew very well *The Mirror for Magistrates* once more.

that it would be part of such an inquiry as the present to possess myself of it, and read it line by line. For the length and the breadth of that grisly plain are strewn with prosodic instances; and contain at least one remarkable, but not much noticed, prosodic discussion. It is over now. Phaer and Ferrers and Baldwin, Higgins and Niccols and the singular Blennerhassett (what relation to Skelton's girl friend, Mistress Jane?), who executed in Castle Cornet at Guernsey<sup>1</sup> a large loop or extension of the piece, apparently at his own instigation, are all familiar to me. The further points in this curious example of collaboration or continuation which now require notice are, first, some of its actual prosodic characteristics considered from a fresh point of view; secondly, the prosodic discussion above referred to; thirdly, the evidence of prosodic progress, which its numerous editions, extending over more than half a century of time, furnish to us by comparison. Let these be taken in order.

Lesson of its  
prosodic  
freaks.

The first is here of least importance; but it *is* important, and it leads up directly to the second. As was previously noted, the general metre is rhyme-royal, varied occasionally with others and varied in itself by certain freaks—not merely such as Ferrers' already-mentioned extension of it to regular Alexandrines, but of a more irresponsible character. Most even of the earlier writers have escaped the utter chaos of Hawes; but they allow themselves occasional Alexandrines. Once<sup>2</sup> the septets give place to what looks like a stanza, but is really six lines of fourteen couplet. Final stanzas are often prolonged to octaves, and in one instance<sup>3</sup> there is a remarkable anticipation (perhaps a suggestion?) of Giles Fletcher's cut-down Spenserian with the Alexandrine ending—a thing overlooked, I suppose, by those who will not let Spenser be of his own creation. In another case,

<sup>1</sup> I wonder if he did it in ~~a~~ very pleasant upper chamber of one of the towers which has a glorious view, and, when I knew it, was used sometimes as a prison and sometimes as a card-room? (It was in the latter capacity that I became acquainted with it)

<sup>2</sup> i. 29, ed. Haslewood (London, 1815), "King Albanact," St. 27.

<sup>3</sup> i. 151, last stanza of "King Iago."



but for one decasyllabic slip, an Envoy of three stanzas is *all* Alexandrine in the Ferrers fashion. In a few cases Alexandrines and decasyllables seem to be "castered" out as carelessly as by Hawes himself. Even doggerel of an anapæstic type does make its appearance—of which more presently. Once at least<sup>1</sup> there is a *sixteener*; and more than once quatrains, decasyllabic or other. One Envoy provides a sort of choice of octaves or septets; while the option is extended to nine in another (though with no Alexandrine conclusion), and in a single final stanza of yet another to eleven. The "Complaint of Cadwallader" is in continuous Alexandrine "blanks," with a few probably accidental rhymes. A curious quatrain of three Alexandrines and a fourteener appears; and it may come almost as a shock on the unwary reader to find Skelton's *Quia ecce nunc in pulvere dormio*, with its older-world tone and air, in this newer company, and to discover that the Princes are murdered in the Tower to the broken rhyme-royal almost contemporary with the event. But this last, it is soon seen, was intentional.

These earlier and more interesting parts of the *Mirror* have a framework of prose discussion in which the authors and their company make remarks on the pieces. Here "the matter was well enough liked by some, but the metre was disliked almost of all. Divers" even "would not allow it."<sup>2</sup> However, one argued that as King Richard "never kept measure in any of his doings," measure ought not to be expected in accounts of them. Nor does this seem to be merely a joke; for the speaker goes on to say that the writer "both could and would amend in many places, save for keeping the decorum which he purposely hath observed herein." And so on another piece of the kind, supposed to be the work of a blacksmith. An odd argument: but the important point is that, in 1563 certainly, and perhaps even earlier still metre was "mis-

Of the prose  
discussions.

<sup>1</sup> The captains Euridane and Thessalone companions in the prey (i. 203).

<sup>2</sup> ii. 394. The two pieces will be found on each side of this prose. So also the Cadwallader blanks above referred to have a prose comment noticing their agreement "with the Roman verse called iambus" and condemning the "gotish kind of rhyming." But this was later—c. 1578.

liked," seen to be "rude," and so forth, which would have been the regular thing not so very many years earlier.

Of its later  
editions.

These remarks are, in fact, of extreme value, and they take rank before Gascoigne's *Notes*, and therefore before everything else in the chain of evidence, showing how the sense of rhythm *consciously* impressed itself upon Englishmen. There are, indeed, no details; we could hardly expect them. But we have evidently got out of the time when the Lydgatian licences seemed natural; though Lydgate's reputation—ratified as it had been by generations—continued in a general way a little longer. That nearly perfect verse like Sackville's, and very imperfect verse like that of some of the others, should find themselves side by side, is a fact of value in itself; that, however imperfectly, a sense of the difference should exist even in persons who had not by any means broken themselves altogether to the more excellent way, is something very much more. Spenser is near, though not come. It is still something more, if not much, that Higgins, who represents the bridge of transition between the earliest contributors to the *Mirror* and its latest, should be aware that people may find fault with his metre. But the book, as a whole, contributes a more important evidence than this from a period later still—indeed, as late as almost anything with which we are dealing in this particular division of our subject. This is to be found in the "buck-washing," as Mr. Carlyle would have said, of Niccols. This good gentleman is fully penetrated with the sense of metrical regularity; he shows the fact that he lives not merely after Spenser and the final *rhythmicising* of English poetry, but after Gascoigne and the fortunately *not* final attempt to tie down this rhythmicising to the narrowest limits. Among the hundreds of new variants initialled "N" in Haslewood, by far the larger number will be found to be Procrustean, shortenings of Alexandrines<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> When Niccols is confronted with the "sixteener" above cited, he takes his courage in both hands, and does not merely cut out a word or two. It appears in his version as

Stout Euridane and Thessalone I did assay,  
an Alexandrine being admissible in the place.

to decasyllables, and other trimmings of the same kind. A sort of White Terror has begun: you are to be nothing if not syllabically precise.

The remarkable position and the not less remarkable contents of *Notes of Instruction* have been, and will be, frequently referred to. Indeed, the little book, curiously unpretentious, is the very spring and well-head of the stream of English prosody on the preceptist side. It has been thought to be, and perhaps is, to some extent indebted—for suggestion rather than anything else—to Ronsard's somewhat earlier tract; but there is no resemblance of principle. It is so short and so much to the point, that an abstract of it is hardly necessary. Its doctrines can be put as succinctly as could well be desired. They are, first, that accent must be attended to; secondly, that metre must be kept—you must not wander from one measure to another; thirdly, that there is, at the time, hardly any foot in English save a dissyllabic one—a position of the highest importance, which Gascoigne states unwillingly, saying that we "have had" others, and that they exist even in Chaucer; fourthly, that the pause or cæsura ought to be in certain places, except in rhyme-royal, where "it skills not where it be." He mentions, besides this rhyme-royal, "riding rhyme" and "poulter's measure" (the decasyllabic couplet, and the alternate Alexandrine and fourteenner), as well as octosyllabics, but makes no reference, or only an oblique one, to the new "versifying," which, indeed, at his date was little more than an academic amusement.<sup>1</sup> There is a most remarkable omission, in connection with that fateful limitation to the dissyllabic foot, of any reference to such work as Tusser's, which was being constantly reprinted. Probably he disdained the subject too much.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, other interesting things in Gascoigne, especially his early deprecation of poetic "commonplaces"—"cherry lips," etc.; but they are not strictly prosodic. His peremptory adoption of "Heaven" ("Heavn" as it was commonly written) as a monosyllable, not to be lengthened except by "licence," is a precious prosodic *point de repère*.

<sup>2</sup> Very great indebtedness to Gascoigne, and some through him or directly to Ronsard, has sometimes been ascribed to King James the First, then only James's *Rewlis* the Sixth, in his *Rewlis and Cautelis* of Scots verse, 1584. There is also a *and Cautelis*.

It is an old brocard in English history that the Wars of the Roses made English statesmen, and Englishmen generally, fear nothing so much as a conflict for succession. One might almost say that the prosodic anarchy which was contemporary with the "differing of the red and white" exercised a similar influence upon English prosodists. From this came Gascoigne's notion, and the notions which, as we have just seen, preceded Gascoigne in practice, if not in theory. From this came Spenser's shyness of trisyllabic feet, and the rarity with which the almost infinite variety of Elizabethan and Caroline lyric permits itself the galloping metres. From this came the abominable "apostrophation" of the seventeenth century, and its regularised but not much improved form in the

theory that it may represent exercises done by James for Buchanan. In itself it is rather a disappointing little book; very clear and precise, but jejune, and giving little more than an analysis of the actual practice in recent Scots, which, as we have several times observed, was itself much more precise and regular than that of English. It has some oddities of phrase—the chief of which is the usual, though not invariable, misuse of "foot" for "syllable"—an ordinary heroic being a "verse of ten *feet*," etc. "Colours" too is used, not in the ordinary sense, nor in the technical one of rhetoric, but as equivalent to "metres." James, as we might expect, lays down his laws in a very Medea-and-Persian fashion; and scarcely ever attempts a reason. He agrees with his English and French predecessors—perhaps authorities—in representing the iamb as practically the only foot: but allows an easement in the shape of what he calls the "Tumbling" verse, which is not so much doggerel as the alliterative line of the middle period. Within the example he gives "bob-and-wheel" trimmings. He also calls these "rouncevals" a word of many meanings and disputed origin. "Tumbling" itself has been thought to be a translation of "cadence" (*cf.* his word "flowing" for "rhythm"; but see my note, vol. i. p. 160, to which, though exception has been taken to it, I adhere). He calls pause or *cæsura* "section," again translating literally. He will not allow identical syllables to rhyme. He specifies couplets—oddly described as "rhyme that is not verse"; a nine-line stanza decasyllabic *aabaabbab*; a bastard octave which he calls "Ballad royal"; rhyme-royal proper, which he calls "Troilus verse"; sonnets; the tumbling variety; "common verse"; an octosyllabic sixain *ababcc*, and "cuttit and brokena verse," of which his example is Montgomerie's *Cherry and Slae* stanza, but which he justly says may be and is "daily invented according to the poet's pleasure." The little tractate is by far the most exact and precise prosodic handbook that exists in any form of English before Bysshe; and although it is not, like Bysshe's, a sort of Arian *Quicumque vult*, proscribing all the wrong things and proscribing most of the right, it is rather sapless and scholastic. The citation of the *Cherry and Slae* stanza years before the first known edition of that work may be noteworthy, especially in connection with Howell's use of it three years earlier still. See Professor Raleigh's ed. of Howell's *Devises* (Oxford, 1906).

eighteenth. From this came the grave disapproval with which Milton's *Samson*, dealing as it did with the green withes of syllabic confinement, was received by some, and I suppose also the more singular and surprising series of fictions by which others have more lately thought to show that the withes were not broken after all.

Altogether, this, or rather the nervous shrinking from the other extreme which caused it, constituted the Second Peril of English prosody. It had escaped the first, as we saw, partly by the uprising of alliteration from its hundred years' trance, and much more by the agency of the ballad. But both these had shown themselves untrustworthy agencies. It escaped the second by the aid of Shakespeare and Milton.

Some other strictly Elizabethan critics say little on prosody proper; even Chapman, whose combined learning and pugnacity might lead us to expect aggressive rather than defensive explanation of his choice of metre, says little about it.<sup>1</sup> And there is a curious absence of prosodic remark in Jonson's *Discoveries*, which those who lay the utmost stress on his borrowing from the ancients might interpret in their own way. We know (*v. sup.*) from the less authentic but (with the due grains of salt) acceptable *Conversations*, that he thought Fraunce "a fool" for writing hexameters; that he thought Donne deserved hanging for not keeping accent; that he did not like Spenser's metre; and that he thought the couplet, though under an ambiguous description, best of all.<sup>2</sup> But this knowledge comes to us only through the not exactly untrustworthy but extremely incomplete channel of Drummond's notes; and the full deliverances, or others not reported, might very much affect his actual serious

Chapman,  
Jonson,  
Drayton.

<sup>1</sup> His curious remark as to the division of some fourteeners has been quoted above, p. III.

<sup>2</sup> "He had an intention to perfect an Epic Poem . . . it is all in couplets, for he detesteth all other rhymes. He had written a Discourse of Poesy both against Campion and Daniel, especially this last, where he proves couplets to be the bravest sort of verses, *especially when they are broken like hexameters*, and that cross-rhymes and stanzas . . . were all forced." Now, whether "broken like hexameters" means a strong cæsura, or enjambment, positive people may positively decide.

opinion and doctrine. The last utterance of importance on the subject that seems fit to be handled in this chapter is the remarkable note of Drayton to the *Barons' Wars*, on his refashioning them from *Mortimeriados*, and on his altering the stanza from rhyme-royal to octave. He says (illustrating the change with interlaced diagrams like Puttenham's) that he thought the double couplet at the end "softened the verse more than the majesty of the subject would permit, unless they had been all couplets or geminels." The "couplet in base" of the octave seemed to him better; while, thereby showing almost certainly that he had Puttenham before him, "the quatrain doth never bring forth gemells," "the quinzain too soon," while the "sestia," which Puttenham had preferred, "detains not the music long enough." To which he adds the highly characteristic conceit that the octave, like the Tuscan pillar, has a shaft of six diameters and a base of two. But (surprising and ominous conclusion!) "all stanzas are tyrants and torturers." The "geminel" or "gemell" seems to be his real love, after all.<sup>1</sup>

In this deliverance, brief as it is, in the asserted preference of Jonson for the couplet and dislike of the stanza, and in other things, we can see the "Prophecy of Famine" in regard to metre, which is to be gradually fulfilled, until the couplet itself is left the only authorised prosodic food. The thing would be curious, if it were not so common. "Man never is but always to be blest," and, in the very days when he has got the greatest of all prosodic triumphs in the Spenserian, there comes from the mouths of men like Drayton, who can manage stanza only less well than Spenser himself, the grumbling at it, and the cry for something different.

<sup>1</sup> My friend, Professor Elton, than whom certainly no one knows more about Drayton, rather demurs to this, and insists on the qualification as to stanzas (which I accordingly quote), "when they make invention obey their number," and on Drayton's *practice*. But this is, to me, a precious illustration of that singular *historical* character of prosody on which I myself lay so much stress. Drayton was a born (and a pretty early born) Elizabethan, and his practice followed his birth-date—thank the Muses! But his theory looks onward, and shows the influence of the later times into which he for some space lived. And much the same is the case with Jonson.

Let Gascoigne, however, and Drayton have the credit which they deserve. Gascoigne, though he seems to acquiesce—not quite happily, but rather supinely—in a disastrous prosodic disinheritance ; Drayton, though he seems to repine, not so much after as in the midst of “the cucumbers and the melons and the garlic” of prosodic abundance,—do actually and in reality found as poets, the one the entire conscious prosodic study of English, the other the attempt to discover the poetic values and qualities of metre. For which let there be to them all due honour.

## INTERCHAPTER V

IT would be difficult to find an instance where the system of halting to collect results up to the moment justifies, and in fact imposes itself, more clearly than in the present. The remark which has been made above as to Allot's *England's Parnassus* is worth recalling ; for that collection appeared at about the middle, roughly speaking, of the period covered by the foregoing Book—the period from 1580 to 1620, in round numbers—though our actual terminations are of course jagged and tallied, not squarely cut off. When we closed the last Book and volume everything, with almost the single exception of the work of Spenser, in which we deliberately anticipated, was inchoate. As we halt now, everything in the stage, or almost everything except the aftergrowth of Caroline lyric and the narrative blank verse of Milton, has reached perfection. That there is no sign of over-ripeness cannot be said ; but no reasonable person would expect, or even wish, to be able to say it.

The general characteristic of the forty years' work is that of the most daring and multiform experiment, conducted, however, for the most part, with the sureness and almost scientific certainty of success, of which Spenser set the first example, and was in a way the accepted master. It is no contradiction to the words just used that this experiment works in directions which Spenser himself never tried. The discipline and the guidance that succeed in an Arctic expedition are not very likely to be useless in an Antarctic.

That there is something a little uncanny in the run of good luck which attends these experiments may be



admitted readily enough; there is always something uncanny in great and beautiful matters. But, for a time, it seems as if things cannot go wrong. The dangerous and pernicious heresy of classical "versing" is supported for years by the greatest wits of the day, and never quite loses its hold on some of them; but it does no harm. The mistake as to the single foot to which Gascoigne testifies, and which will do some harm later, for a time does little or none; and its action is even beneficial as stopping the return to doggerel. And meanwhile, whatever they think and theorise about, they all "go and do"; and some mysterious power wills it, and brings it about, that they nearly all go and do well. Each of the divisions of prosodic accomplishment in the time has a double blessing: it gives good individual results, and it helps to fortify and establish some general principle of English prosody. Even the lolloping fourteener of Surrey and Wyatt becomes the fiery one of Southwell and Chapman before it recognises its still higher possibilities in broken form, and gives us the miraculous beauty of the Caroline "common measure." The couplet gradually separates itself into its two kinds, and for a time manages to combine a good deal of the merits of both. The various stanzas, in hierarchy ascending to, and descending again from, the supreme Spenserian, recover all the beauty and more than the variety and flexibility of Chaucer. And in all, and still more in two other forms or groups of form to be specially noticed in a moment, there is, for the first time since Chaucer himself, and with this exception for the first time at all, a pervading adequacy and mastery of prosodic principle and practice.

No more do the fingers fumble with the fiddle-strings; no more is there not merely a chance, but something like a certainty, of Pegasus going lame or snapping a sinew before he has walked or flown for a few lines. The harmony produced may be more or less beautiful; more or less accomplished; more or less rare; but it is a regular and settled accomplishment—the absence of it, not the presence, is the exception and the surprise. But

what is still the surprise, and must always continue to be so, as long as prosody and poetry last, is the endless variety of the effects to which this new acquisition of the general system of English verse, and this incomparable spirit of experiment, in combination lead. And it is in the two kinds just glanced at that this surprise is most constantly ready for us—that is to say, in blank verse and in lyric; while in both there are points, other but certainly not minor, to consider.

That blank verse should become a school of freedom is not astonishing, more particularly as we saw that, in the beginning, it was a school of something quite opposite. For as soon as the blank verser began to be familiar enough with his instrument to recognise that it was quite independent of rhyme—that he need not even supply the place of that mentor by a rigid regularity of syllabic composition—enfranchisement in other directions was sure to follow. Had it been much used for “papers of verses”<sup>1</sup> (Gascoigne, and one or two others, be it remembered, did so use it) the punctilio might have held. But practically restricted to the stage as it was for so long, the mere scuffling and heat of word-and-wit-combat were sure to encourage—nay, to force—the discarding of unnecessary and troublesome uniformity. Once more, the Fortune of England thought of what was necessary, and supplied Shakespeare to carry out the liberation in this direction, just as she had supplied Spenser to carry out the regimenting and drilling in the other.

But even Fortune cannot conquer Nature; and there was a peril in this path from which the other was comparatively free. Everybody is the better for discipline: everybody is not competent to manage liberty. In fact, if (which is luckily not yet the case) every man wrote poetry, I am not sure that the strict preceptists would not have a great deal to say for themselves. This, however, is speculation. It is mere history to say that, even

<sup>1</sup> “These numbers [blanks] therefore are fittest for a play; the others for a *paper of verses* or a poem: blank verse being as much below them, etc.” Crites in Dryden’s *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, ed. Ker, i. 91.

before our present period closed, the dangers of a go-as-you-please blank verse began to be apparent. But it had not, by this time, so much incurred them as shown the possibility of them. And, on the other hand, it had, in the legitimate carrying out of the great base-principles of English prosody—foot-division with substitution, pause-arrangement with licence to shift, and permission of extrametrical syllable at the end only—enriched English with such a measure as no other language then possessed, and as, in perfection, no other language has ever possessed. This measure is absolutely rhythmical and metrical—absolutely distinguished from prose, and yet uniting the virtues of verse and the shiftfulness of prose as nothing else ever has done, as it is difficult to believe that anything else ever will do. For, though there is no limit to the powers of Nature in one sense, there appears to be in her a certain generosity which prevents her depriving a perfect creation of its *differentia*, when this is once displayed. We have seen as great metres, for instance, as the Homeric or the Lucretian hexameter, but nothing has ever had the *same* merit; and so on.

The desire for variety found almost equal—some would say greater—satisfaction in the innumerable lyrical forms of the time, but the fortunate necessity of *correspondence*<sup>1</sup> precluded, in the case of writers with any ear at all (and ear at this time was almost satyrically acute and universal), any lapse into disorder. It is probably a sense—and certainly a result—of this safeguard, combined with the unconquerable experimentality of the time, that accounts for the innumerable and almost unclassifiable multitude of lyric forms that meet us. We saw in the last volume that Hawes, who cannot keep himself straight even in a single rhyme-royal stanza because of his neglect

<sup>1</sup> A note on this word may not be superfluous. Correspondence, in the line or between the lines, is the note of all metre; but in variety, and in call upon the attention, it is especially the note of lyric. And while, when you have written an undoubtedly musical line, you have *got* to make the other or the others musical to suit it, even a dubiously musical one will acquire a certain harmony from the fact of there being a pair to it. But this is *metaprosodic*.

of line composition, is regular enough in the not particularly beautiful but definitely lyrical forms of the *Conversion of Swearers*. And we saw that the "intermediates" Googe, Gascoigne, Turberville, etc., though uninspiring, were safe enough here. By our present time we have the safety *with* inspiration; and the result is not merely the actual beauty of the songs in drama, romance, or mere music-book, but the promise and certainty of more to come, not shadowed by any of the dubieties of blank verse. The inspiration may fail—*will* fail, though not entirely for another couple of generations. But the forms are secure, and will wait for it to return.

One special point, of the first importance in prosodic history, must have its paragraph: and this concerns the fortune of trisyllabic feet and triple-time measures during this period. The central *preceptist* fact is, of course, Gascoigne's constantly to be quoted dictum: and it can summon round, and in support of it, numerous or innumerable instances of elision or apostrophation in accordance with the idea. On the other hand, we have—earlier than Gascoigne, and, if not recognised as poetry, constantly printed as verse throughout the half century—Tusser's frank, abundant, and perfectly regular practice in anapæstic metre; a persistent if not very copious dropping into triple time on the part of the song-writers with Campion at their head; the more and more constant *trisyllabising* of blank verse; and the occurrence in other forms of collocations which, though they *may* be susceptible of crushing or cramming into sham dissyllables to suit theory, are more naturally and very much more harmoniously trisyllables. Here the aid of music may be cordially recognised; for something of the kind was of the greatest importance to serve as a rallying-point against the dogmatic delusion chronicled in the *Notes and Instructions*. But on the whole, though there has now and then been a tendency to banish triple time too absolutely from this period, we must admit that it was something of an interloper—looked on askance in the more regular and full-dress forms of poetry, and taught

mainly in the hedge schools thereof. But, as we have seen before, the hedge school is sometimes the depository of the truest doctrine.

Nor should there be the slightest reluctance in admitting this, or the slightest sorrow or surprise at it, even among those who believe that trisyllabic intermixture, and trisyllabic domination at times, are essential to the perfect development of English prosody. To everything there is a season; and to every season there are certain things to which it should chiefly devote itself. The special things to which this great period had to devote itself were the enfranchising and varying of blank verse, and the thorough establishment of rhymed verse on a basis of regularity, that should escape sing-song and observe variety—regard being in all cases had to the warding off of any return to doggerel.

And so far as it is concerned—so far as the flourishing time of the authors chiefly dealt with extends—we may almost say that it did its work as impeccably as is consistent with human experiment and tentative. In the more dangerous and problematical task of delimiting the province of blank verse, it perhaps went near to overstepping, if it did not actually overstep, the bounds; and it was left to Milton, after those bounds had been not merely overstepped but overrun in the most disorderly fashion, and indeed nearly overthrown, to take order further with the matter. But in regard to the thorough reformation, advancement, and perfecting of rhymed verse, especially in stanza form, there is no such exception to take to it. It left, no doubt, something to be done in respect of both forms of couplet, and still more of trisyllabic verse, but it cannot be justly charged with having even initiated—even given far-off symptoms of—degradation in either.

In particular, the regeneration of the stanza in almost every form, from the Spenserian, the sonnet, and the great ode-strophes, down to the smallest combinations of lyric, and its information with poetical spirit by the way of rhythm, are marvellous things to contemplate. As we

have shown fully in the first volume, English, as soon as it had received its true prosody, had early shown itself prolific in elaborate stanza-forms, and before the dark quarter of the Early English moon, Chaucer had, in rhyme-royal, shown this capacity of our language for stanza in all but the highest degree. But, except Chaucer and a few anonyms, there had not been very many poets who had been able to infuse "cry" and varied music into stanza-forms, and after him everything went to pieces except in the simplest shapes of ballad and carol. The intermediate Elizabethans, except Sackville, had to some extent restored regularity, but without acquiring charm, and with a rather limited amount of variety. Now all this was changed. From the great strophes or pseudo-strophes of Spenser's odes through the sonnet, the regular long-poem stanzas from the Spenserian to the quatrain, and the zigzag designs of lyric, complexity and variety of form and outline were combined with adequacy of music. The octosyllable, complete or catalectic, was restored and perfected; the fourteeners spirited up; the Alexandrine attempted; the great staple line, the decasyllable, fingered with a conjurer's prestidigitation into almost every conceivable contour and resonance. The possibilities were, of course, not nearly exhausted, for they are inexhaustible; even the actual development of them was to be busily continued for another technical "generation." But the extent to which they were drawn upon, and the success of the drawings, are enormous and wonderful.

Only as to the couplet have some reservations, already hinted at, to be formulated a little more distinctly. It is largely and well practised; as we have seen, one great authority is at least asserted to have declared for it in preference to all others; and another seems to be in two minds about it—not quite to know what to think on that point. But, beyond all doubt, a certain difficulty has been created by the fact that its great exemplar, Chaucer, is an exemplar impossible to follow exactly. Although I do not agree (while mentioning them for all

honour) with those who hold that even Spenser confused Chaucer's decasyllables with a kind of doggerel—although I think that *Mother Hubbard's Tale* absolutely negatives this,—yet I feel that in the uncertainty of the Elizabethan grasp of the couplet—in the veering and yawing between the stopped and enjambed forms which is the evident result, not of a designed combination of the two, but of an irresolute and unclear grasp of either—there is evidence that the prosodic mind was not made up about it. That making up of the mind is exactly what we shall have to survey in the next two Books. But even here admirable work was turned out, in the enjambed form especially; and not a little of the same combination of method and music which we have been noticing in other measures displays itself here also.

Lastly—for this chapter is in a sense more of an instalment than most of our Interchapters, and it will have to be supplemented in the next in regard to the whole or major Elizabethan period—this special time deserves the high credit of having been the first definitely to enter upon the study as well as the practice, the apprehension as well as the perception, of prosody. That any great progress was made in this direction cannot indeed be said. It was practically impossible that there should be any such as yet. The famous bull about "these roads before they were made" applies pretty exactly. If the Elizabethan critics had seen the Elizabethan poems before they were made, they might have had a better chance of understanding and blessing the makers. They *did* see them to a certain extent in the making, and did not wholly fail to bless. But the disadvantage of their position as compared, let us say, with that of Aristotle, is obvious and undeniable. Further, they devoted themselves for the most part to other things than pure prosodic study; they committed themselves to some heresies when they did attempt it; and by far the greater part of their labours in its province was bestowed on the worst heresy of all. Nor did any of them, till Daniel, take the orthodox side in a distinct

and satisfactory fashion. But we have done our best to account for this, and the aberration has at worst the praise—not such a faint praise as may be thought—of having “got itself done.”

For the rest, it was too early ; and the business of the time was not really criticism of any kind. The garden had to be cultivated ; and it was.



BOOK VI

LATER JACOBEOAN AND CAROLINE  
POETRY



## CHAPTER I

### MILTON

Studies of Milton's prosody frequent—Reasons for this—The early minor pieces—The *Nativity* Hymn—The *Arcades*, etc.—Note on Translations, *note*—The octosyllabic group—The Sonnets—*Lycidas*—Originality of its form—Compared with Spenser—Analysis—Rationale of the system—The blank verse—*Comus*—*Paradise Lost*—The abjuration of rhyme—Examination of the verse—Apostrophation—*Paradise Regained*—*Samson Agonistes*—Attempts, to systematise apparent anomaly—Mr. Bridges' view—Discussion of it—Contrast of it with our system—The printing argument—Cacophonies—The "scanned not pronounced" argument—Classical parallels and comparisons—The true prosodic position of Milton—Conclusion on uncontentious points.

THERE is no English writer on whose prosody so much in proportion has been written as on Milton's; and the reasons for this are sufficiently evident, though perhaps the strongest of all in reality is not so apparent as some others, and the most apparent of all is not the strongest. This last is the towering reputation of Milton as a poet; yet Shakespeare is in that respect even greater, and *in proportion* Shakespeare's prosody has received far less attention. But then it is a vast, and on some not uncommonly accepted theories of the subject, a rather hopeless example; while Milton's *looks* comparatively plain sailing. Further, there is an obvious and piquant contrast-progress of the sort which attracts study, in the poet's successive devotion to rhyme and solemnly proclaimed apostasy from it, and in the hardening and ossifying of the form of blank verse that he preferred.

Studies of  
Milton's  
prosody  
frequent.

Reasons for  
this.

Thirdly, there is the point—obvious again to everybody likely to take the slightest interest in the matter—that Milton is a “master of harmonies” such as we have had few. But more really, though perhaps more secretly, potent than all these is the fact that he provides a great, and perhaps the last great, turning or settling point of English versification. Chaucer brings to perfection, as far as his time allows, all or most of the scattered tentatives and experiments of the nonage. Spenser, after Chaucer’s garnerings have been mostly wasted, and when the conditions have been changed, repeats the process in a certain sense finally, but only to a limited extent, and with respect especially to the stricter stanza-forms. Shakespeare opens up the whole possibilities of blank verse in the direction of the utmost freedom, and illustrates the freer lyric to almost an equal extent. But the freedom of blank verse turns to licence and slipshodness, and that of lyric to a certain taste for meticulous and petty prettiness. [Then comes Milton, and leaving in his earlier work a perpetual monument and model of verse that shall have all reasonable freedom but no mere looseness—of rhymed verse that shall employ rhyme with some of its cunningest and most perfect embellishments—takes non-dramatic blank verse in hand once for all, and introduces into it the order, proportion, and finish which dramatic blank verse had then lost, and which it has hardly since recovered. The history is indeed not over: we shall have abundance of error and right-doing, of experiment bad and good, of new perfections and new shortcomings, to record. But we shall come to no one—not Dryden nor Pope, not Coleridge nor Keats, not Tennyson nor Browning—who occupies, in regard to general prosody, the same position as these four poets, of whom we are now to deal with the last. For the very reason, indicated above, of the pains that have been spent by others on the matter, the treatment will have to be rather more controversial than it has usually been; but, for that very reason it is all the more desirable to stick to our method, and to begin with a rigidly historical account of the facts.

In the poet's earliest work — postponing the early sonnets for notice with their fellows—it is only by the operation of a common and not unamiable but very uncritical fallacy that specially "vital signs" can be detected. Any fairly clever boy of fifteen with a taste for poetry, and with the English poetry up to the date of the first-folio Shakespeare before him, might have written the two Psalm Paraphrases. The more ambitious "Death of a Fair Infant" two years later, does its Alexandrine-tipped rhyme-royal deftly enough, and has a forecast of the future in the use of the compound epithet, which, however, was common enough in Elizabethan poetry. The "Trivial Masque"—as one might call the "Vacation Exercise," if more people were likely to know what *trivium* means—shows a great advance in couplet verse on the Paraphrases and, just towards the close, holds out another promise—that of the faculty of dealing with proper names. Of the Hobson pieces we need say little: Milton's mirth was always rather dismal, prosodically and otherwise. There is greater merit in the "May Morning," but it is too short to found much on; and though the "Shakespeare" lines have been rather unfairly accused of rhetoric, conceit, and even bombast—though one or two of them are really fine and have true prosodic throb in them<sup>1</sup>—they call for no stay.

The early  
minor pieces.

It is far otherwise with "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity"; and whatever may be the futility of the unfavourable criticisms of this, they are at any rate not futile as showing that the critics have no ear for verse. It was written in 1629, when all the great Elizabethans proper were dead or soon to die, and before the wonderful parade and concert of Caroline bird-song and bird-feather had well begun. The opening stanzas of rhyme-royal, if not entirely consummate, have some-

The Nativity  
Hymn.

<sup>1</sup> Especially

Under a star-ypointing pyramid,  
and

Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,

where the position of the only polysyllable among the monosyllables is no novice's work.

thing individual in them, and at any rate show much more prosodic accomplishment than their predecessors on the "Fair Infant" four years earlier. But when the "Hymn" proper begins, where are the ears—or being there, of what length can they be?—that miss a wonderful nativity—speaking with reverence—in the world of prosody itself? The form<sup>1</sup> is 6, 6, 10, 6, 6, 10, 8, 12, rhymed *aabcbdd*. We have seen that constructions of this kind had been common in the fourteenth-century lyrics, and the fourteenth-fifteenth-century miracle-plays, and that the Elizabethan poets, even before Spenser, but much more after his example, had also been prone to them. It would merely take a certain amount of time and trouble to determine whether the particular combination schematically exists before. What I will undertake to say, on my faith and function as a historian of prosody, is that the prosodic turn given to the scheme does not. The artist is young, and he makes a few slips. His occasional double rhymes—there are very few of them—were better away, save perhaps in the last stanza; but this does no serious harm. The atmosphere of almost unearthly solemnity which, very mainly by pure prosodic means, he has thrown over the whole is miraculous. It cannot be an accident that almost without exception (there are, in fact, only two, and these, "around" and "amaze," are more apparent than real) the two opening lines in each stanza end with a monosyllable, and the proportion of the rise in line-length from 6, 10 to 8, 12, which gives the main distinction from Drummond, is not likely to be accidental either. Trisyllabic feet are very

<sup>1</sup> There is something partly like it in Drummond's *Divine Poems*, but the splendid *coda* of 8, 12, so cunningly appended, is wanting, and the rhyme-order is very inferior.

Amidst the azure clear  
Of Jordan's sacred streams,  
Jordan of Lebanon the offspring dear,  
Where Zephyrs flow'rs unclothe  
And sun shines with new beams,  
With grave and stately grace a nymph arose.

Compare also Sir John Beaumont's *Ode of the Blessed Trinity*.

rare; the stately, almost awestruck, tone of the verse rejects them. The great Miltonic phrase, "that twice-battered God of Palestine," is with us already; but this is not strictly prosodic, though it is always a means in prosody's hand. The double epithet, which always necessarily affects the run of the line (from the fact that its syllables are closer knit than those of two words), and that "science of names" in which Milton has had no rival but Victor Hugo, and which is prosodic or nothing—these are with us too. And "everything goes in"—everything works together for a steady rise in each stanza, and from stanza to stanza through the whole poem—like volumes of incense rolling higher and higher.<sup>1</sup> It used to be a joke to compose fancy reviews, pooh-poohing great works in literature at their appearance. I am not in the least afraid of what I should have said of "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" if, *per impossibile* in many ways, it had been sent me in a parcel at the beginning of 1630 for criticism.

Much less need be said of the other strictly minor poems. The "Marchioness of Winchester" epitaph goes with *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, for the metre of which it is a less perfect study. The very beautiful *Arcades* stands

The *Arcades*,  
etc.

<sup>1</sup> Well known as it all ought to be, one must beautify and sanctify the page with a couple of stanzas—

The lonely mountains o'er,  
And the resounding shore.  
A voice of weeping heard and loud lament:  
From haunted spring and dale  
Edged with poplar pale,  
The parting Genius is with sighing sent.  
With flower-inwoven tresses torn,  
The Nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

In consecrated earth,  
And on the holy hearth,  
The Lars and Lemures moan with midnight plaint.  
In urns and altars round,  
A drear and dying sound  
Affrights the Flamens at their service quaint;  
And the still marble seems to sweat,  
While each peculiar power forsakes his wonted seat.

in something of the same relation to *Comus*, and shows, in more ways than one, Milton's study of Lyly and Peele. The solid part, as we may say, is decasyllabic couplet instead of blank verse, and makes one sorry that we have not more couplet from him; and the two exquisite songs are quite Peelian-Shakespearian. So, too, the prosodic forms of "At a Solemn Music," "Time," and "The Circumcision" are chiefly interesting to compare with the choruses of *Samson* long afterwards. But none of these requires the individual attention which must be given to the octosyllables of *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Comus*; to the Sonnets; to the unique form of *Lycidas*; to the successive blank verse of *Comus*, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson*, and to the already-mentioned choruses of this latter.<sup>1</sup>

The octo-  
syllabic group. "Where on earth did you get that style?" said the astonished Jeffrey to Macaulay in reference to his Essay

Note on  
Translations

<sup>1</sup> There are some metrical experiments not elsewhere tried, and therefore of interest, in the Translations of the Psalms, which are a good deal later than the body of the minor poems, but earlier than the blank verse. They do not, however, require any special notice. It is otherwise with the famous version of the Pyrrha ode of Horace. Milton himself tells us that this is rendered "almost word for word without rhyme, according to the Latin measure, as near as the language will permit." Now this "Latin measure" is (and it must be remembered that Milton carefully subjoins the Latin text)—

Quis multa gracilis te puer in rosa  
Perfusus liquidis urget odoribus  
Grato, Pyrrha, sub antro?  
Cui flavam religas comam?

And Milton Englishes—

What slender youth, bedewed with liquid odours,  
Courts thee on roses in some pleasant cave,  
Pyrrha? For whom bindst thou  
In wreaths thy golden hair?

Now it would be quite a fair question, "If you think that Milton elsewhere used trisyllabic feet, how do you account for his *not* using them here, where they exist in the original to which he says he has kept "in measure as near as the language will permit"? It is, I say, quite a fair question, but I am not careful to answer it. Milton sees that the trisyllabic feet of the third and fourth line are only apparent and that the measure is throughout choriambic. What is rather surprising is that he did not try whether his favourite combination of trochee and iambs could not be extended to suit it. I think Milton's ear would always have protected him against the attempt to combine dactyls with iambs or spondees in English. With trochees they go well enough. (See below, note, p. 255.)



on Milton. Nobody need have asked the same question of Milton himself as to the prosodic style of *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and the lyrical parts of *Comus*, with its essay-pieces in the "Marchioness of Winchester" epitaph, and the *Arcades*. It is probable that Milton had no small knowledge of the octosyllable-heptasyllable, which had been almost the earliest and quite the most constant form of English metre. We know that he knew Chaucer; there can be no reasonable doubt that he knew Gower and Lydgate; and it would be odd if, when his "younger feet wandered" in that maze of romance<sup>1</sup> of which they never wholly forgot the blessed secrets, he had not even further extended his knowledge of this, *the* metre (with the romance-six) of the English versions. But his immediate creditor, though more modern, was far more illustrious, for it was nobody less than Shakespeare himself. It might not be fair—though I have no doubt about the matter myself—to allege the "cat with eyes of coal" passage in *Pericles*, which is prosodically indistinguishable from some of the best of the twin character-poems; but it is also not in the least needful. As early as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (if not earlier), in the opening fairy verses of the Second Act, this tripping measure—which pirouettes on either foot, iamb or trochee, with equal ease, and "twinkles interchange" of the two with almost bewildering but never-failing accuracy and intricacy combined—is one of Shakespeare's favourite woodnotes; it recurs through this play, and in many others. Here Milton had nothing to reinforce, to reform, or to improve. He had merely to catch the key-note<sup>2</sup> and carry it out with such variation of his own as he might, with such perfection as he could.

Of the perfection there has rarely been any doubt.

<sup>1</sup> It may be just worth while to remind the reader that a long rhyme-royal poem on Guy of Warwick by John Lane, a friend of Milton's father, actually exists in MS. with a commendatory sonnet by the elder Milton himself. See Mr. Ward's *Catalogue of Romances in the MS. Department of the British Museum*, i. 497 (London, 1883).

<sup>2</sup> Some will have it that he caught it from or through Fletcher. But this is not a study of all Milton's possible sources or teachers. Shakespeare was quite enough for him, as for Fletcher himself.

Even Johnson could find no fault with the two main instances, though he probably did not like the admixture of the mode in *Comus*; and it was reserved for the duller pedantry of John Scott of Amwell, and Vicesimus Knox, in the darkest dark of neo-classic night before the dawn Romantic, to fall foul of it. But *they* are hardly important enough to give any valid answer to a *Quis vituperavit?* The ear which cannot hear the music of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, or of the even greater and certainly not less sweet close of *Comus*, must be deaf alike to the harp of Ariel and the lute of Apollo.

For variation or idiosyncrasy there was rather less room. Shakespeare had only used the form incidentally, but he had used it not infrequently; it is not a form of the widest range in itself, and Shakespeare (as has been remarked more than once already) had a knack of leaving very few "numbers to fulfil" for those who came after him. Yet Milton has done a good deal, not merely by his subtle power of fingering, so as to vary scheme with theme, but also by bringing to the service of the verse those two great instruments of his own unique phrase and of the proper name. The latter, though used with some freedom, achieves less astounding effects than in *Lycidas* and in the *Paradises*, simply because the shorter and lighter lines do not require, or indeed admit of it; but the former is pushed to almost its possible furthest. The famous "light fantastic toe" (the metre itself) is an instance, and an obvious one: but I do not know that it is so wonderful as the selection, for its particular place and service, of such a word as "dappled," where the darker and lighter spots or streaks of the dawn are actually represented by the trochaic rhythm. Very noticeable, too, is the fashion in which the graver effect in *Il Penseroso* is attained by the use of feet which are practically spondees. Milton, it was observed at the beginning, is perhaps the first English non-dramatic poet who uses the spondee much, and he certainly makes the most of it in such instances as the magnificent

Or that *starr'd* Ethiop Queen that strove ;

while it is particularly noticeable that he scarcely ever—I think never—clogs the trochaically cadenced lines with these feet, but keeps them for double-shotting the pure iambics. Not very much can be done with pause in this short line; but what can be, Milton does. And just in passing, he writes that famous verse—one of his own finest and one of the finest in English poetry, though later ears have come to dislike the valued “ī-ōn”—

The Cherub Contemplation,

to be in future days at once a choke-pear and a stumbling-block to Dr. Guest, and to show how absolutely wrong that excellent scholar's general theories are.<sup>1</sup>

The sonnet is a very much more artificial-looking The Sonnets. form than the octosyllable; and Milton, since we have abandoned Johnson's point of view, has been generally held to be one of our most “artificial” practitioners of it. I am myself sorry that he reverted to the Petrarchian scheme; but it is not surprising, from his fondness for Italian, and it may perhaps be admitted that the subjects of nearly all his pieces invite if they do not exclusively demand it. For the sonnet passionate or the sonnet meditative the English form is at least the equal of the Italian; but for sonnets descriptive, sonnets of address to persons, and the like, it is perhaps less good. In the former cases the final couplet clenches; in the latter the final tercet softens the close—flourishes it off, as it were. The fanatics of division and of rule generally, may be shocked at the “Nightingale” for splitting itself absolutely in sense and sound at the middle of the seventh line.<sup>2</sup> Our side will simply say, “Why not?” But nobody, I suppose, putting some ugly rhyme aside, will question the majesty of the “Three-and-Twentieth Year,” though that majesty may seem already to carry with it a certain stiffness—a *castiliano* which is too likely to become *vulgo*. “Captain or Colonel” is prosodically noteworthy, not

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Skeat, p. 184. It will be better discussed when we come to Guest himself.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the “double rhyme-royal” noticed at vol. i. p. 308.

only for the extreme beauty of its close and (less favourably) for the dysphony of line six—

That *call fame* on such gentle acts as these,  
where the spondaic effect could be dispensed with, as it  
could not in

Whatever clime the *sun's bright* circle warms—

but for the fact that the beauty of the sixain is largely due to three or even four trisyllabic feet—"Ema|thian con|queror"; "tem|ple and tower"; and "the Athen|ian walls." Of course, the people who believe in elision, and especially in Miltonic elision, will cry "I object!" here. But they cannot steal the syllables from me, if they can from themselves. "*Securus scando*."

So is it with "Pi|ty and ruth" and "thy o|dorous lamp" in the "Virtuous Young Lady," which is also noticeable (though scarcely more so than all these sonnets) for the very great part which the pause plays in it. Hardly in *Paradise Lost* itself does Milton use this pedal action more powerfully. In the "Lady Margaret" I believe the persons just referred to scan "fa|tal to lib|erty" "fat'l to"; but as this is a collocation of sounds which my tongue cannot express, and my ear rejects with horror, I prefer the fact to the non-fact. One need say nothing on the first "Tetrachordon" piece, except that the people who seriously rebuke Milton for splitting Mile-End between two lines seem to show that there is an absence of humour more absolute even than his own. The second must always live, in minds that care for verse, by the gorgeous line—

Which after held the Sun and Moon in fee.

But the "New Forcers" might pair off with "Tetrachordon I." if it were not for the interesting prosodic experiment of the "tailed" sonnet. I wish I knew whether Milton did this, as he did the rhyme-split in the other, with burlesque intent;<sup>1</sup> or whether it was, if

<sup>1</sup> The Italians undoubtedly did, and do, this; see, for instance, Carducci's delightful "*Pietro Fanfani e le postille*," which the soul of Catullus must have chuckled at and applauded. And some precisions of "kind" would associate it especially with offensive or satiric, not merely burlesque, purpose.

perhaps only in part, a genuine experiment in a form more spacious than the quatorzain. At any rate, I rather wonder why more poets have not followed it from this latter point of view. The thing is obviously close to the old long stanzas with "bob and wheel"—things so thoroughly English that they deserved resuscitation.

The beautiful "Lawes" sonnet is doubly and trebly ours. For it shows us that Milton did not confuse musical and poetical music as so many have done and do; that he recognised "short and long" as the capital prosodic terms, and that he objected, as all good poets have objected, to the neglect of these by composers. As for "committing," it has, I believe, been differently interpreted, but the sense seems to me not in the least ambiguous. There is, however, a prosodic side to the device adopted (of course from the Italians) by Milton, and copied almost *ad nauseam* by his followers, of beginning the sonnet with an appellative, "Harry," "Cromwell," "Fairfax," "Vane," etc. It has, of course, a certain *arresting* effect; and as you are not supposed to read more than one of the sonnets at once, the objection that it gets monotonous and tricky is not wholly valid. But, to my taste at least, it gives the sonnet rather too much of declamatory tone, and interrupts the steady rise which the trisyllabic metrical clause of Shakespeare (*v. sup.* p. 60) so admirably achieves. In all of these, however, those prosodic "rosin-secrets" of Milton's which have been already referred to appear, and especially his hardly excelled power of knitting the whole of a verse-paragraph into one by variation of pause and weight. To Milton, indeed, the sonnet is not much more than a form of verse-paragraph; and (*valeat quantum*) this peculiarity, in which he is followed by Wordsworth, seems to me to put him, as a sonneteer, not merely below Shakespeare but below Keats and Rossetti. The magnificence, however, prosodic as other, of the "Piedmont" piece is undeniable; and though its end is weak poetically and logically, "Babylonian" saves it from the point of view of prosody, while it damns it from others. As for "On his Blindness," not only sorrows but admirations are

silent when they reach a certain magnitude. It could not be better; and it is really curious that, different as are the schemes, it is the most Shakespearian of all. Nor are the succeeding four much inferior. But the quality of the prosody in all may (without offence meant) be characterised as tending towards the rhetorical. *Here* one understands, even when one does not share, Johnson's suspicion, in another division, of the "periods of the declaimer" as intruders into verse.<sup>1</sup>

*Lycidas.* The opinion of the same great but strongly "conditioned" critic on *Lycidas* is one of the best-known things relating to prosody.<sup>2</sup> It is as certain as anything involving a point of taste can be, that that opinion was wrong; it is equally certain that the fault lay in the critic's premisses, not in his reasoning. If extremely regular verse, with rhymes even more regular still, is the best kind of verse—a kind from which everything else is a falling short; much more, if this is the *only* kind of verse that is much worth aiming at,—then Johnson's unfavourable judgment on the versification of *Lycidas* is justified in every detail. If, however, any such standard as this is a fond thing vainly invented; if regular verse and regular rhyme are good things in their way, but "irregular" verse and "irregular" rhymes good things in another, and sometimes an even better way,—then the judgment may be "antiquated." And, not in the least by childish exaggeration and contradiction, but in strict accordance with the principles and the observed results of this whole inquiry, we may be able to find cause for pronouncing *Lycidas* prosodically one of the very masterpieces of English poetry, displaying

<sup>1</sup> May I make a little excursion-protest against the interpretation of "spare to interpose" in the Lawes sonnet as equivalent to "refrain from interposing"? It is against the tenor not merely of the sonnet itself, but of the Cyriac one. Moreover, Milton knew his Shakespeare too well not to remember—

If Clifford cannot *spare* his friends a curse,

and meant, I feel sure, "Spare *time* to interpose them oft." Why not let him be a good fellow, on the not too frequent possibilities?

<sup>2</sup> It is not, however, one always exactly quoted. The actual words in the *Life* are: "*Lycidas*: of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers displeasing." Perhaps I should add that I take *Lycidas* before *Comus*, partly because of its brevity, and partly to get the blank verse together.

a virtuosity at once in diction, numbers, and rhyme hardly paralleled elsewhere, and yet converting this from *mere* virtuosity—from pretentious and elaborate art—into something more like actual nature, in its unforced and ripened mellowness.

The term Monody, which Milton himself applies to this poem, has two senses in Greek; and it is probable that the poet intended to adopt both. One concerns form, and denotes a solo-piece as opposed to the combined choric ode; the other concerns matter, and is equivalent by customary restriction to "lament" or "dirge." That Milton had the actual choruses of Greek tragedy in his mind there can be no doubt; but he is certain also to have had before him the less rigidly concerted odes of various English predecessors, specially those two great ones of his master Spenser, to which we have tried to do justice in their place.<sup>1</sup> From these two modes, however, though passages of the three poems possess a not dissimilar rhythmical arrangement, he parted in the first instance by making his stanzas much less uniform. Spenser had adopted stanza-forms so long that they would hardly strike the ear as stanzas had it not been for the refrains which tip and outline them, but of pretty uniform length—eighteen lines throughout the *Prothalamion* and at the beginning and end of the *Epithalamion*, nineteen in the body of the latter. Milton discards the refrain altogether; and attempting no uniform stanza-length at all,<sup>2</sup> converts the stanzas (for stanzas they still are after a fashion) into something once more like his beloved verse-paragraph—definitely finished, and corresponding to others like a paragraph of prose, but, like prose paragraphs themselves, acknowledging no obligation of corresponding length. Again, he uses that not infrequent *shortening* of the line which is indispensable to verse that is to have the choric

Originality of  
its form.

<sup>1</sup> The *Prothalamion* and *Epithalamion*; *v. sup.* i. 362.

<sup>2</sup> Thereby, no doubt, aggravating his "uncertainty" and "unpleasingness" in Johnson's eyes; though the Doctor and his sect did not love even regular stanzas. Of course, Milton had the *canzone* in mind more or less directly. I need hardly keep the warning bell of "Italian" constantly ringing in regard to him. But the *canzone* is regular.

Compared  
with Spenser.

or odic effect ; but he uses it less frequently than Spenser and with very much less regularity. Still, his most audacious and most successful innovation is in regard to the rhyme ; and there can be no doubt that it was this which most annoyed Johnson's ear, accustomed and enslaved as it was to the clock-tick of the couplet. Spenser intertwines his rhymes, of course, but he does it with considerable, if not with absolute regularity, on the ordinary stanza-plan ; though the great range of his model to some extent disguises this regularity. But Milton does not merely not attempt—it is quite clear that he deliberately eschews—a regular rhyme-scheme of any kind. He will suit his rhyme to the exigences of his individual paragraph, and to nothing else.

Thus we have a first paragraph of fourteen lines, all of five feet, except line 4, which is of three only, but rhymed *oabbaacdadaoa*,<sup>1</sup> where two of the lines are blanks ; and there are only five rhymes altogether, but one of these occurs no less than six times. Now, Spenser, in his eighteen- or nineteen-line stanzas, had usually had at least eight rhymes, and had never repeated any more than four times.

Analysis.

Milton's second paragraph-stanza is much shorter, but more varied in line-length, consisting of eight lines, 10, 10, 10, 10, 6, 10, 6, 10, rhymed *oaabbcco*, or of two blank-verse lines enclosing (as it were) three couplets. The third discards the blank first line altogether ; and of its lines—fourteen once more—only one is not five-foot, and that is one of Milton's favourite catalectic octosyllables of optionally trochaic rhythm, though it *may* be taken as three feet only, and iambic. The rhymes are *aabcbcddeffegg*, a concerted effect approaching nearer to Spenser than the two others. The mere skeleton analysis of the rest, though of considerable importance except to "ignorant impatience," may be relegated to a note.<sup>2</sup> The poem

<sup>1</sup> I may remind the reader that I use *o* for a non-corresponding end-syllable. Two or more *o*'s do not rhyme to each other or to anything else.

<sup>2</sup> Fourth, thirteen lines—10, 10, 10, 10, 6, 10, 6, 10, 10, 10, 6, 10 ; rhymed *abcabdddefegfg*.

Fifth, fourteen lines—all tens but l. 7, which is a six ; *aoabbccddedfeffe*.



ends with its first regular "stanza"—an octave of even decasyllables rhymed *abababcc*. But no two others are alike in length, line-composition, or rhyme-arrangement.

Thus the first, and perhaps the last, impression produced by the poem is that of the extremest prosodic variety; and it may very well be that Johnson failed entirely to catch the *symphonic* effect which this variety admits and, in fact, produces. It is not quite certain that everybody sees it now; but there is no doubt about it; and this symphonic effect is very mainly produced by the uncertainty of the rhymes themselves. With stanzas of regular length, and regularly rhymed, the individual stanza is what chiefly takes the attention; and when it is mastered, there is mere repetition. Here the attention, aroused at first by the failure of the rhyme—it was probably for this reason that Milton left *both* the opening lines of the first two stanzas blank—is reassured by the prompt appearance of it, and yet warned by the irregularity of that appearance that it must not go to sleep. The frequent but spasmodic occurrence of the *a* rhyme in Stanza One clenches this appeal, this satisfaction, and this warning at once. Never till the end—when the regular octave is probably intended to have something like the effect of the Shakespearian end-couplet to a blank-verse *tirade*—is the interest of uncertainty and chance allowed to drop; seldom is expectation defrauded by blank lines; and yet the evident possibility of these heightens the pleasure of the ear when the rhyme comes. Besides this, the recurrence has a *knitting* effect within the paragraph, while its disappearance marks the paragraph close. That this would be a very dangerous—indeed, an almost hopeless—game for any one but an exceptional master of

Rationale of  
the system.

Sixth, twenty-one lines—all tens but the six at l. 16; *abccbadededdfjfgghhoii*.

Seventh, eighteen lines—10, 10, 10, 6, 10, 6, 10, 10, 10, 10, 7, 10, 10, 10, 10, 10, 10; *ababccooodeedfjfgghg*.

Eighth, twenty-nine lines—all tens except the sixth, which is six; rhymed *abbabacddcdceffefgh<sub>2</sub>ihihhj*.

Ninth, thirty-three lines—all tens except six at l. 14; rhymed *ababbbccdeedf-gg<sub>2</sub>fijijklklmnlmnpopgg*.

Tenth, twenty-one lines—all tens; *ababbaccdeedfjfgghhii*.

Eleventh, or *coda*, described in text.

harmonies to play, hardly needs insisting on. It is a sort of game of Japanese butterflies—things which the conjurer casts into the air to flit and flutter among themselves, till it is time for them to float down and settle. And to effect it, he has to resort to every minor device of pause and line-weighting and lightening, quickening or slacking off, with all the science of names and words that he can muster. "Everything [once more] goes in"; his beloved Chaucerian trick of putting one epithet before and one after the noun, which inevitably "holds up" the phrase; the more curious but certain arrangement of a pair of epithetted nouns, where in one case the noun is monosyllabic and the epithet dissyllabic, and in the other the values change over. Of the names themselves, probably the greatest instance, even in Milton, occurs, as does the device just mentioned, in the famous lines—

Sleep'st by the fable of *Bellerus* old,  
Where the *great vision* of the *guarded Mount*  
Looks towards *Namancos* and *Bayona's* hold.

I always wish Dionysius and Longinus could have known—as indeed they may know—this incomparable illustration of their joint doctrine of the "beautiful word."<sup>1</sup>

It must be evident to any one who reads *Lycidas* carefully, that it is in effect a piece of blank verse carefully equipped with rhyme, for the purpose, technically speaking, of providing it with a lyric vehicle. The pause-arrangement is quite that of blank verse, modified a little by the fact of the rhyme, which relieves pause of some of the duties that fall upon it in pure blanks. His system, moreover, has freed the poet, almost automatically, from the tendency to adopt the stopped Marlowesque line-form which, as we shall see, is so frequent in *Comus*, and he stops or enjambes as he pleases; in fact, there are things in *Lycidas* not unsuggestive of the enjambed couplet which the author's contemporaries were abusing and to abuse. Spondees are not infrequent and very effective, as in

<sup>1</sup> It is all the more interesting that, as we know from the Cambridge MS., Milton first used "Corineus," and then substituted the far more obscure, but in the place far more euphonious, "Bellerus."

Together both ere the *high lawns* appeared,  
 and the perhaps more doubtful one in  
 Battening our flocks with the *fresh dews* of night,  
 and the certain one, again, of

Set off to the world, nor in *broad rumour* lies.

This last might introduce us to a still thornier point—of which I shall not attempt to grapple with all the thorns till presently—the trisyllabic feet of the piece. Once more, I have not been furnished by nature with the organs of speech needful for the pronunciation “thwrl̩d” in any fashion that is not extremely ugly to the other organs of hearing with which nature *has* provided me; while the natural “to the world” appears to me to add a singular charm to the line, and to contrast, in specially appropriate fashion, with the subsequent spondee itself. So, too, I have no doubt about

Shatter your leaves before the mel|lowing year,

or “melodious tear,” or “battening” in the line quoted above, or about “watery bier” and “westerling wheel,” or “the hideous roar.”

But there is in *Lycidas* one trisyllabic foot which one might have thought indisputable by any one, and that is to be found in

O fountain *Arethuse*, and thou honoured flood;

for Milton was about the last person to take liberties with a word sacred alike in classic legend and prosody. Nor do I think him likely to have called Virgil's Mincius “Minshus”; the loss of “reckoning” in St. Peter's speech would be grievous; and it is strange that there should be, as no doubt there are, people who prefer

And ev'ry flow'r that sad embroid'ry wears,

with its eighteenth-century snipsnap, to the winding sweetness of

And every flower that sad embroidery wears,

or would rather force "loryate" in the place of "laureate" three lines lower, or would throw away the beauty of "perz'lous" before "flood" in the last line before the *coda*. So, too, those who like "thuncouth" or "thoaks" must, I suppose, have one or the other. As for me and my house, we will neither of them.<sup>1</sup>

The blank  
verse.

It is, however, beyond all question, on Milton's blank verse itself that the main attention of any student of his period must be concentrated. Indeed, that prosody, in this particular respect, is, as was remarked above, almost the only instance in which the versification of any English author has been seriously subjected to serious examination, for a long space of time, and from very different points of systematic view. This is natural enough when we remember the almost instantaneous position which Milton attained, the way in which dictators of literature like Addison and Johnson devoted themselves to him, and, above all, the fact that he was the first to establish this peculiarly English form of metre in non-dramatic poetry. Some readers would perhaps wish to have a sketch of the views which have thus come into being as an opening of the inquiry; but I prefer, as usual, to let Milton himself speak before seeing what other people have said about him. And in most cases even this must wait till we come to themselves, lest we disturb what is almost as important to us as the history of prosody itself, the history of prosodic opinion.

The documents of the inquiry are, as everybody knows, four, but may perhaps be taken as presenting three rather than four stages of development and attitude. *Comus* unquestionably represents the poet's youth and

<sup>1</sup> I must take leave to postpone the consideration of the demur—"But it is *not* proposed to drop the *pronunciation* of elided syllables." It may perhaps be asked, "Does not the Cambridge autograph settle this matter?" No, it does not. "Imbroidrie" is indeed written there; but "livery" appears in the alternative line for exactly the same prosodic value. So earlier, l. 12, "watrie," but l. 29, "glistering." In all these four cases the presence or absence of the *e* makes a trisyllabic or a dissyllabic foot as the case may be; and the MS. is as obstinately yea-nay as if it were a counsellor of Panurge.

early manhood in life and literature at once; *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, his age. The verse of *Paradise Lost*, published not long before the latest two, represents either successive stages, or the result of successive stages, extending over some twenty years at least. Further (to get all the facts into order and position, however well they be known), the first and the last of these documents, *Comus* and *Samson*, are in dramatic form, the *Paradises* in narrative.

The kinds of drama to which the two plays belong are not quite irrelevant to the inquiry; but they may be considered too curiously. *Comus* gives itself out as a *Comus*. "Masque," and though specialists have, in their usual way, quarrelled about its title to the title, the plain man will not imitate them. *Comus* is a masque, because its author called (or let call) it so;<sup>1</sup> because it was written to be acted by amateurs; because it has more of the supernatural in it than ordinary plays even at that time admitted; because it is evidently intended for music; and because there is large spectacle and decoration in it. But it admits also much more regular dialogue, and rather more coherent plot, than the usual masque does; and if things had so been that it had been written now, its author would probably have called it "a Lyrical Drama." Further yet, it is clear that the writer has immediately before him such things of Shakespeare's as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, but that he is also paying special attention to the University Wits, and has not exactly cleared his prosodic mind of the mixed impressions derived from these studies. Lastly, he is full of the Greek drama, as well as of the English. Peele and Shakespeare, Marlowe and Euripides, however "confusedly" (to adopt the Shakespearian word), are before his eyes as the inspirers of his *mimesis*. The *Old Wives' Tale* is actually in some sort, though not to any great extent, his canvas. The Attendant Spirit is a

<sup>1</sup> In fact, as ought to be well known, he never, so far as we know, himself called it anything else, *Comus* itself being a later label for distinction's sake.

middle-aged and sedater Ariel, a Puck turned serious. "Divine philosophy" gives us a sort of assonanced echo of Tamburlaine's "divine Zenocrate" in one line, and "musical as is Apollo's lute" walks, dropping the adjective "bright," straight out of *Love's Labour's Lost* in the next but one; while Comus and the Lady "knap verses" with each other in the truest style of Greek *stichomythia*. The poet has in one place not shaken off "Ens and the Predicaments," and is didactic in a way which would have made Aristotle class him with Empedocles as doubtfully a poet, and Quintilian put him in the "middle" division. Elsewhere he is altogether run off with by his own descriptive exuberance, and may well release his captor from all damages *de raptu suo*. It is no wonder that pedants of the parallel-passage, pedants of kind, pedants of all sorts, have more or less shaken their heads over *Comus*: while those who care for poetry, and for poetry only, have sometimes been profane enough to think that he never did anything much more poetical.

The "confusedness," however, and the multiplicity of aim and pattern certainly reflect themselves in the blank verse. The lyrics show nothing similar: there he had already mastered his instrument; it had, in fact, been mastered for him and before him. Here he had not mastered it, and, except Shakespeare in rather different conditions, nobody had. The consequence is that the blank verse of *Comus* is obviously and multifariously experimental. The opening block of seventeen lines<sup>1</sup> is

<sup>1</sup> Before the starry threshold of Jove's court  
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes  
Of bright aerial spirits live insphered  
In regions mild of calm and serene air,  
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot  
Which men call Earth, and, with low-thoughted care,  
Confined and pestered in this pinfold here,  
Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being,  
Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives,  
After this mortal change, to her true servants  
Amongst the enthroned gods on sainted seats.  
Yet some there be that by due steps aspire  
To lay their just hands on that golden key

very carefully and regularly written ; but it is noteworthy that it has not the paragraph effect at all—that the lines, though not exactly stopped, have something of the old bullet-mould model, and that twice the poet runs perilously close to rhyme—"care" and "here," still more "key" and "Eternity."<sup>1</sup> In the second he warms to his work : the pauses are more varied and the lines more broken and vari-cadenced, while the paragraph effect, if not fully, is nearly achieved. In both these he allows himself the redundant syllable ; though those who think he called peril "per'r'l" may deny this. The third and longest still more acquires *vires eundo* ; and here there are two striking licences clearly intended to subserve variety and symphonic effect. The first of these is the famous line—

To quench the drouth of Phœbus, which as they taste,

where I should unhesitatingly make the last foot an anapæst, where those who believe in the amphibrach would of course bring the longest foot into the fourth place, and where others would resort to one of their acts of prosodic *escamotage* with an extrametrical syllable at a cæsura. The second is—

Soon as the potion works, their human count'nance,

where I should (having been taught to distrust "apostrophation" by much study of seventeenth-century originals) as unhesitatingly restore the *e* and make a very effective Alexandrine (*v. inf.*).

The lyrical entry of Comus himself indulges in a little decasyllabic couplet ; and at the half-tempting,

That opes the palace of eternity.  
To such my errand is ; and, but for such,  
I would not soil these pure ambrosial weeds  
With the rank vapours of this sin-worn mould.

It may be worth observing that in the Cambridge MS. there is a long insertion (14 lines after l. 4), beautiful in itself, but even less paragraphic in effect. I daresay some readers would like more reference to these variants, but I must once more plead that I am writing three volumes, not thirty.

<sup>1</sup> The blank-verse Italians have often done this ; in fact, it is excessively difficult to prevent in Italian. In English non-dramatic blank verse it is nearly fatal ; but that would only be found out in practice.

half-inconvenient approach of the Lady he breaks off into blanks again. They have more of the *spoken* character—that is to say, more of the strictly conversational—than the overture of the Spirit, which, naturally enough, is somewhat Senecan and declamatory. And this reappears, for all its beauty, in the long soliloquy of the Lady herself. But that soliloquy shows increasing signs of the period- and paragraph-“fingering,” which is to be ubiquitous in *Paradise Lost*. Indeed, Milton has seldom given us a more accomplished verse-period than that (171–177) from

Methought it was the sound

to

And thank the gods amiss.<sup>1</sup>

At line 192 we have what is to me once more a pretty certain Alexandrine, such as Milton could find dozens and scores of in Shakespeare—

Is not the labour of my thoughts. 'Tis likeliest,

though no doubt some people may crumple and gobble up the end into a mere redundancy, just as in 217 they may spoil a striking phrase of the Lady—

That He, the Supreme Good, *to whom* all things ill,

by slurring it into “twom.” It is to be observed that the redundant syllable is here, and continues to be, very prevalent, Milton taking his latest Shakespearian model—that of *The Tempest*.

In the speech of Comus which follows the exquisite song “Sweet Echo,” the last half-dozen lines addressed to the Lady<sup>2</sup> are probably intended (she seems to imply

<sup>1</sup> Methought it was the sound  
Of riot and ill-managed merriment,  
Such as the jocund flute or gamesome pipe  
Stirs up among the loose unlettered hinds,  
When, for their teeming flocks and granges full,  
In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan,  
And thank the gods amiss.

<sup>2</sup> But such a sacred and home-felt delight,  
Such sober certainty of waking bliss,  
I never heard till now. I'll speak to her,



her sense of it in her answer) to bear a rhetorical cast of verse, and the final spondees, "Blest song" and "Tall wood," especially the latter, must have been designed to impart what the Greeks called *δῆκος*—stateliness and pomp,—while the *stichomythia* that follows cannot escape—it never does escape in Greek or English where the lines are not enjambed—a rather ludicrous single-stick effect.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Milton has, probably of purpose, made the enchanter's versification rather ostentatiously artificial. But still it is of a fairly accomplished and late character, suggesting (what is perhaps an exact enough description of it) an attempt to write *Tempest* verse by a person who has almost all the gifts, but not quite all the graces, required.

It is all the more interesting to find the next scene relapsing into a kind of verse twenty or thirty years older. Lines 331-7<sup>2</sup> are quite early Shakespeare, if not even Marlowe—*Titus Andronicus*, if not *Tamburlaine*,—and

---

And she shall be my queen.—Hail, foreign wonder!  
Whom certain these rough shades did never breed,  
Unless the goddess that in rural shrine  
Dwell'st here with Pan or Sylvan, by blest song  
Forbidding every bleak unkindly fog  
To touch the prosperous growth of this tall wood.

- <sup>1</sup> *Comus*. What chance, good Lady, hath bereft you thus?  
*Lady*. Dim darkness and this leavy labyrinth.  
*Comus*. Could that divide you from near-ushering guides?  
*Lady*. They left me weary on a grassy turf.  
*Comus*. By falsehood, or discourtesy, or why?  
*Lady*. To seek i' the valley some cool friendly spring.  
*Comus*. And left your fair side all unguarded, Lady?  
*Lady*. They were but twain, and purposed quick return.  
*Comus*. Perhaps forestalling night prevented them.  
*Lady*. How easy my misfortune is to hit!  
*Comus*. Imports their loss, beside the present need?  
*Lady*. No less than if I should my brothers lose.  
*Comus*. Were they of manly prime, or youthful bloom?  
*Lady*. As smooth as Hebe's their unrazed lips.

- <sup>2</sup> *Eld. Bro*. Unmuffle, ye faint stars; and thou, fair moon,  
That won'tst to love the traveller's benison,  
Stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud,  
And disinherit Chaos, that reigns here  
In double night of darkness and of shades;  
Or, if your influence be quite dammed up  
With black usurping mists . . .

though there is plenty of overrunning in sense, the two Brothers throughout indulge in little but the cumulative fashion of verse in sound. Sometimes blocks of the different kinds come together most curiously, as, for instance, 428-440 contrasted with 441-446, and this latter again with 456-463.<sup>1</sup>

For the drop into couplets of 495-512 I do not think it necessary to seek any further explanation than that Milton found plenty of such drops in Shakespeare, and followed the example. They could not be bad, being his; but, like all his few other examples, they show clearly why he never much affected the form. This, I think, we may explain by the observation that the couplet did not give him that variety of sound which he managed so exquisitely in irregularly rhymed lyric of various line-lengths, and that his mind was too orderly and logical to use rhyme, as his contemporary, Chamberlayne, did, for a mere running accompaniment to para-

<sup>1</sup> Yea, there where very desolation dwells,  
By grotts and caverns shagged with horrid shades,  
She may pass on with unblenched majesty,  
Be it not done in pride, or in presumption.  
Some say no evil thing that walks by night,  
In fog or fire, by lake or moorish fen,  
Blue meagre hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost,  
That breaks his magic chains at curfew time,  
No goblin or swart faery of the mine,  
Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity.  
Do ye believe me yet, or shall I call  
Antiquity from the old schools of Greece  
To testify the arms of chastity?

Hence had the huntress Dian her dread bow,  
Fair silver-shafted queen for ever chaste,  
Wherewith she tamed the brindled lioness  
And spotted mountain-pard, but set at nought  
The frivolous bolt of Cupid; gods and men  
Feared her stern frown, and she was queen o' the woods.

Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,  
And in clear dream and solemn vision  
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear;  
Till oft converse with heavenly habitants  
Begin to cast a beam on the outward shape,  
The unpolluted temple of the mind,  
And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,  
Till all be made immortal. But, when lust . . .

graphs constructed on the blank-verse model. At any rate, he returns at once to "blanks" when the Spirit begins a serious tirade in description of Comus and his rout, and gives one of the longest and finest stretches of it that we have yet had. The type is here not cumulative merely, but thoroughly interwoven, with plentiful diversities of redundance, trisyllables, and the like. The last-named lubricant, too, appears in the otherwise rather stiffened verse of the Elder Brother's speech, inspirited as usual by touches of passion, as in—

And earth's base built on stub|ble. But come, | let's on

But for that damned Magi|cian, let him | be girt

Harpies and Hydras, or all the monstrous forms,

in each of which I do not blink, but invite attention to the presence of the trisyllable at a cæsuræ.<sup>1</sup> Note too the broken Alexandrine—

As to make this relation?

Care and utmost shifts,

which, *as an Alexandrine*, I defy any one who goes about to break.

In line 633 we have one of those experiments—almost inevitable when experiment is once tried—which are not so successful as others—

Bore a bright golden flower, but not | in this soil.

As in other instances, some people, I believe, manage to persuade themselves that this is harmony.<sup>2</sup> I cannot be quite so complaisant. You cannot get "flower, but" into one foot of any kind without extreme jumbling and cacophony; and if you make the fifth foot "in this soil," you are burdened with a redundant syllable of much too

<sup>1</sup> *V. sup.* p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> It is also commonly set down as a "Fletcherism." Milton was undoubtedly much influenced by more than one of the Fletcher family, but I cannot think this awkward end-stumble one of the happiest instances. *V. inf.* on B. and F. themselves.

great weight and bulk, making a sort of spondaic ending,<sup>1</sup> which contrasts most unfortunately with the really and accurately spondaic ending of the very next line—

Unknown and like esteemed ; and the dull swain.

But though I am sure that there is something wrong in a prosodic system which fails to justify, much more in one which condemns, a beautiful line, I think it absurd that any system should be called upon to beautify an ugly one ; and, further, I should regard it as strange if Milton, at the early period of his career especially, made no ugly ones. I think he has made one here.

The anapæstic last foot of 662, on the other hand—

Root-bound, that fled Apollo.

*Lady.*

Fool, | do not boast,

is thoroughly well in place ; and 723 offers a pretty puzzle for prudish prosodists—

The All-giver would be unthanked, would be unpraised.

*We* scan it, of course, as it is printed, and make a beautiful line of it, as suitable to Comus' rapid and fantastic sophistry as anything could be. *They*, I suppose, make it—

Th' All-giver 'd be unthanked, would be unpraised,

or

Th' All-giver would b' unthanked, would be unpraised—

where either alternative, it may be observed, is forced in one case to break the rule which it enforces in the other, and "b' unpraised" has still to be provided for.

So also the splendid Alexandrine—

The sea unfraught would swell, and the unsought diamonds,

must become a mere jumble of words, utterly unworthy of one of the finest concerted pieces in the medium that had yet been written. The more sober structure of the Lady's stately answer contrasts well with this "gay

<sup>1</sup> See the *actual* ending, that is to say. The last foot is, of course, if anything, an antibacchic or a very clumsy amphibrach. I do not want either.

rhetoric," as she calls it; yet there is, after the famous "Crams, and blasphemous his Feeder," another ebullition of contemptuous indignation, like the

Fool! do not boast,  
above, in

Shall | I go on?

And then before the long lyric Act (as we may almost call it) which closes the Masque, and is its most Masquish part, the blank verse appropriately ceases with the admirable description of Sabrina's history, haunts, and habits, which is almost more epic than dramatic. •

In a general estimate of the blank verse of *Comus* we must, of course, take the dramatic form into consideration; but we need not allow too much for it. In the first place, Milton had practically (for Surrey, Gascoigne, etc., may be left out of the question) none but dramatic models before him, even if he had been minded to write plain narrative. In the second, he has in the piece itself little occasion (and when he has it he does not avail himself of it) for the jointed fabric of blank-verse conversation, which, as we have seen, was to Shakespeare so great a school for ease and variety of verse-making, without really deserting the five-foot norm. Milton evidently affects and prefers *tirades*.<sup>1</sup> Of the six or seven hundred lines of blank verse in the piece, single speeches occupy 92, 25, 60, 27, 26, 22, 57, 67, 24, 41, 24, 46, 44, and 48. The shorter speeches do not amount to a hundred lines together, and, putting the exercises in stichomythia aside, not to a score. Moreover, though Milton avails himself of the Alexandrine once or twice certainly, and I think oftener, he scarcely ever tries the imperfect verse—the verse-fragment—which dramatic "blanks" invite, which Shakespeare managed so admirably, and which his successors mismanaged so abominably. His classical

<sup>1</sup> It may be just as well to say that throughout I use this word, not in its late and limited sense, but in the origin alone of a *long* batch of uninterrupted verse, whether epic or dramatic.

models no doubt influenced him here, just as in *Paradise Lost* itself Virgil made him less precise.

On the whole, therefore, there is not much in *Comus*, outside the lyrics, which calls for a stamp of verse not equally available for pure narrative, and for the actual speeches with which narrative is usually diversified; and it could directly serve as a school and exercising ground for narrative blank verse itself.

The scholar certainly shows himself no dunce, and the recruit has left the awkward squad a very long way behind. Complete *ease* of versification he has indeed not quite attained; it is doubtful whether he ever attained this, or whether he wished to attain it. That marvellous, billowy flow of verse on which Shakespeare floats us, with an occasional break or ripple, but mostly "too full for noise or foam," is not what Milton aims at. His verses do not float: they march, and march magnificently, quickening and slackening, altering formation slightly, but always with more touch of *mechanism* in them than we find in Shakespeare, with more of the earth, and less of the wind and the water, if with hardly less of the fire, in their composition.

He has found many, if not most, of the tricks and easements of the process—the redundant syllable, the trisyllabic foot, the Alexandrine; and he makes great use of the full stop in middle line. But his use of the pause has not yet thoroughly perfected itself; and what is more remarkable, he has not yet made any fast grip of the instrument which afterwards he was to employ with such astonishing effect—the development of the verse-paragraph. He has fine periods, but his working up of them into paragraphs is very uncertain: it might almost seem as if he did not attempt it much. Even the opening passage has not the unmistakable paragraph form which one would expect; and elsewhere the nearest approach is *Comus's* aside before addressing the Lady. But he *has* the period—a possession on which that of the paragraph must certainly follow—in twenty fine passages, some of which have been indicated above. And he has

an individual line which is already fit for almost anything, whether it tries unusual cadences, or contents itself with varying the usual from

In regions mild of calm and serene air  
to

Commended her fair innocence to the flood,

and a hundred magnificent prosodic phrases or clauses within the lines. But when we compare the blank verse with the lyrics we see at once that absolute mastery has not been reached in the one as in the other. The *ipsa mollities* of Sir Henry Wotton's letter was surely never so justified in any of the commendatory epistles, then too frequent, as here, from

The star that bids the shepherd fold

to the incomparable close, right on from "Sabrina Fair" to the Spirit's self-dismissal. Nobody could improve these. We feel that the blank verse, admirable as it is, and at times consummate, *is* susceptible of improvement, here and there, and as a whole.

It would be of the first interest if we had any record of the reflections of persons who, familiar with the volumes of 1637 and 1645, found, in one of the earliest issues of *Paradise Lost* twenty years and more after the latter of these volumes, the following pronouncement which, well known as it ought to be, must find a place here because of its importance, and of the fact that it does not invariably appear in modern editions.

### THE VERSE

The measure is English heroic verse without rime, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Virgil in Latin—rime being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame metre; graced indeed since by the use of some famous modern poets, carried away by custom, but much to their own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse,

than else they would have expressed them. Not without cause therefore some both Italian and Spanish poets of prime note have rejected rime both in longer and shorter works, as have also long since our best English tragedies, as a thing of itself, to all judicious ears, trivial and of no true musical delight ; which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another, not in the jingling sound of like endings—a fault avoided by the learned ancients both in poetry and all good oratory. This neglect then of rime so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of riming.

The abjuration of rhyme.

That is to say, the man who thirty years earlier had issued, and who eight years later than that had reissued, work by far the larger part of which had been in rhyme, and who—for the moment let us put it in no stronger fashion—had certainly shown himself not unapt therein, now affected contempt and disgust at the very idea of rhyming. Nobody, so far as we know, made any observations on this anomaly ;<sup>1</sup> the age was, in fact, very little interested in prosodic questions as such ; and it is noteworthy that Dryden, its literary embodiment, a great practical prosodist himself and a fertile critic, hardly deals with them at all, though he tells us that he thought of doing so. And the thing still remains odd ; though we can find quite as much explanation of it as may reasonably be demanded, especially when we remember the partial relapse into the flouted form which *Samson* shows. It is known that the insertion of the paragraph was an after-thought ; and that Milton was not in the best of tempers at having to write it, is pretty evident. He was very often not in the best of tempers : but his crabbedness was probably, in this instance, not due merely to impatience of a kind of apologia.

He had much earlier, in certain famous expressions of his prose work, manifested a violent antipathy to the

<sup>1</sup> Marvell's well-known jibe at "the pack-horse and his bells" does not constitute such an observation.



"vulgar amorists," the "vain and amatorious" poets, of his own and the preceding generation. Now to these poets and in these poems, especially to and in those of his own generation, rhyme had been the most favourite weapon, and the instrument not merely of the most exquisite successes, but of some exploits which were not quite exquisite and not at all successful. Since I have made a rather close study of these contemporaries—more especially from the prosodic point of view—it has been very strongly borne in upon me that Milton must have particularly disliked the enjambed and deliquescent couplet, of which Chamberlayne's *Pharonnida* is the longest and best example, but which had been becoming more and more frequent since the days of Browne. The very instinct which had made him attempt and achieve a triumph of irregular rhyme, fully valued and allowed for, in *Lycidas*, would have made him shrink from this apparently slovenly flux of rhyming lines, in a large number of which the rhyme seems to be totally superfluous except to mark line-ends which are no ends at all, and to provide what his severe musical taste would probably have thought a mere strumming accompaniment. The *Lycidas*-form itself would have been clearly out of place in a long narrative; and the stopped couplet which was just coming in was a little later than Milton, to speak from a true historical inwardness.<sup>1</sup> Nor would it have allowed—what we see from his very words, and could have seen without them from his earlier practice, he was fondest of—his own mastery of the "sense variously drawn out from one line to another." Blank verse would do this; and he must by this time have been far too conscious of his skill (even if it had been the Miltonic way ever to have any doubts on this head) to fear that he could not give harmony enough by rhythm without rhyme. Lastly, there was the charm for such a nature—and for all natures that have any tincture of nobleness in them—of "things unadventured yet." And so he launches the ship of blank verse into the sea, as yet, in fact, unsailed

<sup>1</sup> See the chapters on the couplet.

by it, with no guide but his own soul, and no chart but Shakespeare's practice.

Examination  
of the verse.

To go through the ten thousand lines of *Paradise Lost* exactly as we went through the six or seven hundred of *Comus* would be very tedious, and it would answer no good purpose for the reader, though the writer was bound to do and has done it. There, the prosodist was slightly uncertain of his instrument; here, he is fingering it on definite principles from first to last. There is, of course, considerable difference of opinion as to what those principles are; and before long we may have to put the gloves on, and even to be prepared for other people taking them off. But for the present we may pursue our usual method of dispassionate examination of the phenomena, usual and exceptional, before endeavouring to draw inferences from them. As very great importance has been assigned to the actual printed text, I have thought it well to read it throughout for this purpose in Professor Masson's certified facsimile of the first edition;<sup>1</sup> and where anything turns upon it I shall quote this *literatim*.

Apostroph-  
ation.

The first thing of a prosodic kind which is likely to strike the intelligent novice is the constant printed elision of the definite article, and the substitution of an apostrophe for the final *e* wherever the syllable is not absolutely required to make up a dissyllabic foot, thus—

Fast by the oracle of God;

but in other places "th' upright," "th' infernal," "th' Eternal," "th' Aonian." He will further observe that apostrophation is not confined to this—that "Heav'nly" and "Heav'n" occur regularly, and that some words are syncopated, without even an apostrophe, from the forms he knows best ("adventrous"). At the same time, he will, or should, remark that not merely are two syllables in words like "disobedience," "Aonian," allowed to count as one often, but that in others where there is not the

<sup>1</sup> London, 1877.

same *liaison*—"Siloa's brook," "Tempestuous fire"—no syncopation is typographically indicated.<sup>1</sup>

Passing from these details, if he reads the first paragraph he will find—

(1) That the lines are very regularly decasyllabic, exhibiting no redundant syllable at the end, and nothing that requires the supposition of such an one at the *cæsura*.

(2) That in consequence of the above-mentioned fashions of spelling, there are no even apparently trisyllabic feet except those due to the juxtaposition of vowels as above indicated, and one where the word "Spirit" occurs.

(3) That the sense is "variously drawn out from one verse to another" after the most artful fashion, and that thus, by "verse periods," there is fashioned a "verse paragraph," which, according to choice, may be extended to the whole forty-six lines as printed in the original, or broken at pleasure into a minor paragraph and a kind of *coda*.

<sup>1</sup> It may be well to give the first paragraph in Professor Masson's own text, for comparison :—

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the World, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,  
Sing, Heavenly Muse, that, on the secret top  
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire  
That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed  
In the beginning how the heavens and earth  
Rose out of Chaos: or, if Sion hill  
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed  
Fast by the oracle of God, I thence  
Invoke thy aid to my adventrous song,  
That with no middle flight intends to soar  
Above the Aonian mount, while it pursues  
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.  
And chiefly Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer  
Before all temples the upright heart and pure,  
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first  
Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread,  
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss,  
And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark  
Illumine, what is low raise and support;  
That, to the highth of this great argument,  
I may assert Eternal Providence,  
And justify the ways of God to men.

(4) That the main instrument of this arrangement is the manipulation of the pause, which in the first six lines is respectively in the middle of the fourth foot, at the end of the third (twice), in the middle of the third, in the middle of the second, and at the end of it; while in the seventh there are *two* pauses, of equal value, at the middle of the second and of the fourth. In not a few subsequent lines he will fail to discover any pause at all; and my ear would not quarrel with his if he found practically none in the last three lines running except at their ends. Yet, for all this variety, he will find that, various as is the cadence, it has not the range or the flexibility of Shakespeare's greatest blank-verse passages, chiefly owing to the closer normality of the lines, and to an apparent shyness of trisyllabic feet. That this shyness is always more apparent than real he may or may not be in doubt.

The continued and careful examination of the First Book will make considerable additions to this stock of observations, and will perhaps introduce some important modifications in it. Two hasty generalisations—that Milton *always* inclines to the pronunciation of "Spirit" as "Spi'r't" or "Sprite," and that he invariably makes "Heav'n" a monosyllable<sup>1</sup>—will be corrected by line 101—

Innumerable force of Spi|rits armed

(unless anybody be bold enough, and too bold, so as to scan "Sprites armèd"), and line 297—

On Hea|ven's a|zure; and the torrid clime

(unless, again, the same person proposes "Heav'n's | azur|è and |"—they do things nearly as surprising).

He will further observe certain matters which interfere with similar generalisations of another kind. From the frequent crasis—on the strict decasyllabic system—of adjacent vowels, he may have thought "Siloa's brook" in line 11 meant to be scanned "Sylwa's brook." But he will find that in "th' Aonian mount" he will have to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *sup.* on Gascoigne, and *inf.* on Mitford.

give up his theory, or else value "the" fully; and that many other juxtaposed vowels are fully valued in similar names, "Peor," "Baalim," etc. It is at least possible that his ear will revolt at the spoiling of such a line as

Of glo|ry obscured; | as when the Sun new ris'n

by the ugliness of "Glor | yobscurd," and at "glory extinct" as "glor | yextinct." He may kick, too, at being told to suppress not merely the weak *e*, but a strong vowel like *o* in

Whom reason hath equalled,

and even doubt whether Milton regarded the *e* itself before an *r* as negligible when he reads—

Whom thunder hath made greater,

as well as whether he really meant to call "Emperor" "Emp'ror," on the modern principle of "guv'nor" for "governor."

Should he indeed *not* be a novice, and have some acquaintance with the printed books of the period, he will, or may, from the first doubt whether *any* particular importance is to be attached to the typographical elision of "th'"; but here he may, if not so acquainted, be left to his mistake for a time. Let him, suspending this, go on to Book II. Here he will find some really remarkable lines, such as 123—

Ominous | conjecture on the whole success,

and he will say rashly, "Well! this settles the question as to trisyllabic feet! They certainly will not tell me that Milton—a gentleman, a scholar, and a master of harmonies, pronounced this word 'om'nous' when it is not even spelt so." Let him wait. He may note the curious slipped rhyme of "light" and "flight" at 220-221, and certainly should note the undoubted full value of "Michael" in 294. But he will probably think 123 absolutely settled by 302—

A pillar of state; deep on his front engraven,

and 313—

Princes of Hell? for so the popular vote.

Let him wait again. Line 412—

Through the strict senteries and stations thick,  
should have some interest for him, and if he is disposed  
to attach real importance to printing ll. 421-422—

Pondering the danger with deep thoughts, and each  
In other's count'nance read his own dismay,

will have more; for if "count'nance" is so of prosodic  
malice prepense, why not "pond'ring"? But perhaps  
l. 450 will give him most to think over. This runs—

Me from attempting. Wherefore do I assume;

and to it we may return. He will admire Milton's  
sleight (or rather weight) of prosodic manipulation in

Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death,  
though he may think the internal rhyme of "dens" and  
"fens" an unlucky accident. He should observe 665—

With Lapland witches, while the labouring moon  
(not "lab'ring"), and 681—

Whence and what art thou, execrable shape?

for the full value of "execrable." Moreover, he will find  
"Spi|rit" once more in 956—

Or Spi|rit of the nethermost Abyss.

The places of Book III. shall be indicated with less  
comment; indeed, I am giving but a few of the hundreds  
that I have noted and ready for use. But I will specify  
line 3—

May I express | thee unblamed? | since God is light

(cf. Chaucer's "in thalight," and vol. i. p. 173); line 5—

Bright ef|fluence of | bright essence increate;  
line 36—

And Ti|resias | and Phineus, prophets old;  
line 108—

When Will and Reason (Reason also is Choice),

where *one* "Reason" *must* be dissyllabic, and both may be, with an anapæstic ending, though there also is choice of jamming these very words into "also's." And let there be added 110, "just|ly accuse |"; 120, "sha|dow of fate"; 131-132, "the other," printed in full twice, in the one case trisyllabic or slurred, in the other full-valued; 195, "Conscience" (in *Comus* "Con-science"); 198, "sufferance," not "suff'rance"; 461, "Spirits," dissyllabic; 503, "Heaven" printed with the *e*, though the syllable is not wanted. In 586 a really questionable line appears—

Shoots invisible virtue even to the deep,

which had better be reserved; "Uriel," a trisyllable in 648, and a trisyllabic foot, or else a dissyllable, in 664; with two *reservanda*<sup>1</sup> in 728—

Timely in|terposes, and, her monthly round,  
and 731—

Hence fills and empties, to enlighten the Earth.

In the Fourth Book, noticing the fact that in l. 5—

*Woe to the inhabitants on earth*; that now,

the article is not apostrophated, and allowing in utmost fairness that this may have something to do with the italic type, one observes that for a long time the metre is unusually "regular." But in l. 371 there occurs what some would take as an elision of such an exceptional kind that we must return to it—

Long to conti|nue, and this | high seat, your Heaven;

while in 594 a quantification, happily indisputable, appears which throws light on other disputed ones—

Diurnal, or this less volūbil earth.

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<sup>1</sup> When I speak of such "reservation" and "return" I do not necessarily mean that the quotations will be separately discussed, but that they will form the basis of the general remarks to be made later.

In 720-721 occurs that collision of final and initial spondees—

Thus at their shady lodge arrived *both stood,*  
*Both turned,* and under open sky adored,

which so did disturb the greatest of all accentualists, Dr. Johnson and Dr. Guest, and which so rejoices all footmen, from the admirable selection of the foot for the sense.

806 is a difficult line on both schemes, but much more difficult on one than on another—

Th' animal spirits that from pure blood arise,  
 where, it may be observed, apostrophation, if metrically valid, involves an excessively ugly (if even possible) sound of "thănīmāl | spīrīts," while "Thě ānī|māl spīrīts" is perfectly harmonious.

There is hardly anything else in the Book that needs notice except 884—

Employed, it seems, to violate sleep, and those,  
 where choice is free between the scornful appropriateness of the trisyllabic "vīōlāte" and the jejune vulgarity of "vi'late."

L. 141 of the Fifth is noteworthy—

Shot para|el to the earth his dewy ray,  
 where, no doubt, the devotees of "elision before pure l" would say that the second was omitted to procure it. I very much doubt Milton's thus taking liberties with a Greek word, while I know seventeenth-century printers far too well to doubt *their* doing so; but even if this liberty be conceded there remains the awkward fact that the omission makes the word better for the trisyllabic "Shot pa|ra|el to"; while as for the dissyllabic "par'el," it is an ugliness to which I can allow no redemption, except that it provides a rhyme—otherwise not easy—for Lodovick Carlell.

342, I think, shows how treacherous a thing the apostrophe is—

Rough or smooth rin'd, or bearded husk, or shell;  
 for though there *is* a dialectic form "rine," it is to the



last degree improbable that Milton used it, while "husk" and "shell" point imperatively to the noun "rind."

413 is very interesting—

And corporeal to incorporeal turn.

It must be rather a choke-pear for the "drumming decasyllabists," inasmuch as one of the "-reals" *must* be syncopated and the other not. For my own part I have no doubt that "corporeal" is simply misprinted for "corporal," which in the parallel passage at 496 of this very Book is so printed, and again at 573. This is a very common confusion, and occurs in *Hamlet*. "Incorporal" is less likely, though it occurs in Raleigh.

There should also be noted 563—

High matter thou enjoinst me, O prime of men,

with the practical disappearance of "me," which decasyllabic scansion requires; and perhaps also 585—

Innumerable before th' Almighty's throne,

"for a purpose to be hereafter disclosed," as the projector said in the Bubble time, and indeed sometimes says, not quite *totidem verbis*, in his prospectuses to-day.

Book Six—the famous one of the celestial battles, and, however often one has read it, a marvel alike for the magnificence of its serious substance and the utter wretchedness of the comic inset—has, to be noted prosodically, few things in number, but some of almost unsurpassed importance. The differing values of the -iel and -ael terminations in archangelic and angelic names are really of great moment—"Michael," for instance, having actually *three* values, Mī|chǎēl, Mī|chǎēl, and Mī|ch|āel. But the great places of the Book in prosodic discussion have usually been l. 34—

Universal reproach far worse to bear,

and still more 866—

Burnt after them to the bottomless pit.

These also must be reserved for the present.

In the original edition, as Milton-students know, there are only ten Books—Seven and Eight and Eleven and Twelve in the later being respectively united in the earlier as Seven and Ten. To suit this difference double references will be given where necessary. Of minor matters attention may be drawn to—VII. 15, “tempring” without apostrophe; 73, “the Emphyrean” with valued “the”; 103, a similarly valued “the” with “unapparent”; 127, “temperance” with the *e* neither elided nor valued except as part of a trisyllabic foot—

Her temperance over appetite, to know;

and the characteristic but very differently interpretable  
130—

Wisdom to folly as nourishment to wind.

More vital in itself is 236—

And vital virtue infused and vital warmth,

of which more anon; and still more 390—

Display'd *the op'n* firmament of Heaven,

and 398—

And let the fowl be *multiply'd* on the Earth.

A curious double omission of apostrophation is in 418—

Their brood as numerous hatch from *the* egg, that soon,

and either a complete mistake of the printer or a death-blow to “pop’lar” in 488—

Hereafter joined in her popular tribes.

On some at least the double value of the same word in the following distich will not be lost (526, 527)—

The breath of life; in his own Image he  
Created thee, in the Image of God,

where “Image” and “Imàge” are hardly more noteworthy than the other double testimony simultaneously given, that Milton did not in the least think “elision”

necessary; while yet another double in 533 and 534 must be noted—

Over Fish of the sea and Fowl of the air  
And every living thing that moves on the Earth.

The remainder of the Book in the first version—the Eighth in the second—is less fertile; but it has in 936 (VII. 299, 2nd ed.) one of Milton's curious ditrochaic (or pæonic) openings—

To the Garden of Bliss thy seat prepared,  
and a crux, the "extrametrical" syllable in 1286 (649, 2nd ed.)—

Thy condescension, and shall be honoured ever,  
which also must stand by.

VIII. (*vulgo* IX.) gives another example of "virtue" in 110—

Not in themselves all their known virtue appears;  
and further noteworthy lines in 296—

For he who tempts, *though in vain*, at least asperses,  
and 508—

Ammonian Jove, or *Capitoline*, was seen,  
and 570—

What thou command'st, and right thou shouldst be obeyed.  
These, and especially 904—

The sacred fruit forbidd'n? Some cursed fraud,  
may be consulted by the curious; but, above all, 1082—

And rapture so oft beheld? Those heavenly shapes.  
Does anybody really believe that Milton would have run the risk of the substitution of

And rapture *soft* beheld?

The Tenth Book of the ordinary arrangement—the Ninth of the original—is very rich in prosodic notanda. There is perhaps more than a fanciful inference to be

drawn from the fact that while l. 12 gives us one of the supposed syncopations—

For still they knew, and ought to have still remembered,

1. 22 gives us a full-valued Heaven in a rather remarkable place—

From Earth arriv'd at Heaven Gate, displeased.

There are various retentions of the Latin accent—45, “impulse”; 59, “colleague”; as well as one of the instances of “whether,” monosyllabised according to the common theory, which also requires unusual astringents in 86—

Of high collateral glory ; him Thrones and Powers ;

as again in 106—

Where obvious duty erewhile appeared unsought.

Note also (and especially) 121—

So dreadful to thee? That thou art naked who ;

and almost more especially 178—

And dust shalt eat all *the* days of thy life,

where it is pretty certain that Milton meant to extend the monosyllabic emphasis of the whole line to "the."

A very noteworthy line is 198—

Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife,

where the dignity of the first phrase of judgment will be hopelessly lost if we read—

Because | thou'st hear|ken'd to | th' voice of | thy wife,

instead of

Because | thou hast hear | { kened to the | voice of | thy wife,  
kened to | the voice | of thy wife,

which latter has the special argument in its favour that Milton finishes scores of lines by parallel trisyllables. And if anybody says that apostrophation could not be expected before "voice," let him look at 204—

Unbid, and thou shalt eat th' Herb of th' Field.

The spelling of "idlely" in 236 is here mentioned out of fairness, though or because it cuts both ways, as perhaps does another "virtue" in 372. But passing over some minor points (to be looked up by whoso chooses) in 467, 468 especially, and 562, we come to a famous Guest-choker in 581—

Ophion, with Eurynome, the wide-  
Encroaching Eve perhaps,

where the inextinguishable wrath of the excellent Master of Sidney shows to what extent theory will blind a learned and acute intelligence, at once to beauty and the reason of beauty. For the line *is* beautiful; and the partition of the translation of "Eurynome," besides linking it with the next, excites curiosity to know how the second member will be translated. But to divide a word—even a hyphen-made word—was shocking; and it shocked.

To some ears, at least, great loss of beauty would be caused by the omission to give full value to the italicised syllables in 720—

O miserable of happy! Is this the end;

not "th' end," observe. Observe, too, the cadence in 936—

Me, me only, just object of his ire;

and 1092—

Of sorrow unfeigned and humiliation meek.

There is less later; but in XI. 34 note in connection with the last line quoted—

And propitiation; all his works on me;

while in 559—

Fled and pursued transverse the resonant fugue,

observe what an infinite loss in "suiting the sound to the sense" will come from substituting "res'nant" for "resonant"; and note in 768 and 770 the curious coincidence—more than curious when we consider what

an ear lay hard by the tongue that dictated it, not wrote it—of

Him or his children, *e|vil*, he may | be sure,  
and

And he the future *e|vil* shall | no less.

As for the later part of the Book (which became XII.), less still need, for our purpose, be noted. Those who are pursuing the inquiry seriously will find, among others, ll. 932 (41), "bitu|minous gurge"; 935 (44), "A ci|ty and town | whose top"; 953 (62) "Ridic|ulous and"; instances of "glory," "pillar," and the "able" and "ably" words; and so on. More important are 1131 (240)—

Without | Media|tor, whose high office now,  
and 1419 (518)—

By spiritual; to themselves appropriating.

*Paradise  
Regained.*

*Paradise Regained* does not contribute quite in proportion, but it has some noteworthy lines. Milton's not very frequent, but almost always specially felicitous use of alliteration, appears in I. 93—

The *g*limpses of his Father's *g*lory shine;  
and there is a bold pause, the conditions of which may be disputed, in 140—

O'ershadow her. This Man born and now grown up;  
while the famous crux of "bottomless" reappears in 361—

With them from bliss to the bottomless Deep.

Here, even more than in the other, though I do not think that Milton would have hesitated to scan "bottomless" as an amphibrach, I am inclined to prefer one of his beloved, if not quite wisely beloved, choriambic syzygies (—○○—). But both the First and the Second Book chiefly give us things noted before, excepting a complementary example (II. 154) of choriamb or antispast "as you like it"—

Among daughters of men the fairest found;

and II. 267-269—

And saw the ravens, with their horny beaks,  
Food to Elijah bringing even and morn—  
Though ravenous, taught to abstain from what they brought,

where it is most important to observe that if you do not give "ra-ven-ous" the full syllabic value, which is necessary in "ravens," you spoil that play of words which Milton undoubtedly, however oddly, liked as much as he pretended to dislike rhyme. 289 gives us "bottom" with its usual accent; and 445—

Worthy of memorial) canst thou not remember,

prompts one to ask whether, if Milton preferred the "pure" line, he would not have written "worthy memorial," as he might have done, to get rid of at least one superfluity.

In Book III. the curious different valuations of "glory" in the different places within four lines, 117-120, first invite notice. "Ignominy" in 136—

But condemnation, ignominy and shame,

may suggest different constructions, when taken with the existence of "ignomy." In 392 the final "battles and leagues" is corroboratory of "bottomless deep," as is "idōls with Gōd" (432); and 400—

Thy *politic* maxims or that cumbersome,

may seem to some to justify Count Smorltork.

Book IV. gives at 173—

The abominable terms, impious condition,

one of the most difficult of Miltonic lines to scan musically on *any* system. It seems to me best as an Alexandrine, the slow weight and length of which would fall in with Our Lord's distinctly mentioned "disdain," and the purport of the words themselves. "Fountain of Light," at the end of 289, is another

argument for | bottomless pīt | . It may be noted that Milton accumulates redundant endings here, as he hardly does earlier ; it is curious how this licence seems to be a Eurynome, or "wide-encroaching" temptation ; and the very last words, "private returned," clench the argument for "bottomless" with *unwrenched* accent.

*Samson  
Agonistes.*

The prosodic interest of *Samson Agonistes* is known to be great. It consists partly in the character of the diction, which is the stiffest in Milton, and the most classicised ; partly in the blank verse ; but most in the elaborately modulated measures of the choruses, and in the fact that here the Dalila of Rhyme does actually triumph over *her* Samson, and establishes herself in his house once more after years of separation and obloquy. These choruses are rather grand than beautiful, but they all lend themselves to the strictest foot-scansion.<sup>1</sup>

In the blanks the chief things noteworthy are yet further experiments of the same character as the choriambic ending which we have seen so frequently attempted

- <sup>1</sup> *Oct., Iamb., and Troch.* { This, this | is he | ; softly | awhile ;  
Let us | not break | in up|on him.  
*Dec.* O change | beyond | report, | thought, or | belief !  
*Alex.* See how | he lies | at ran|dom, care|lessly diffused,  
*Hexasyll.* With lan|guished head | unpropt,  
*Hexasyll. hyperc.* As one | with hope | aban|doned,  
*Hexasyll. hyperc.* And by | himself | given o|ver.  
*Oct.* In sla|vish hab|it, ill-fit|ted weeds |  
*Tetrasyll.* O'er-worn | and soiled.  
*Alex.* Or do | my eyes | misre|present ? | Can this | be he ?  
*Oct. cat.* That he|roic, | that re|nowned,  
*Dec.* Irre|sisti|ble Sam|son whom, | unarmed,  
*Alex.* No strength | of man | or fier|cest wild | beast could |  
withstand ;  
*Alex.* Who tore | the li|on as | the li|on tears | the kid ;  
*Dec.* Ran on | embat|tled ar|mies clad | in iron,  
*Hexasyll.* And, wea|ponless | himself, |  
*Alex.* Made arms | ridi|culous, | useless | the for|gery  
*Dec.* Of bra|zen shield | and spear, | the ham|mered cuirass,  
*Dec.* Chalyb|ean-tem|pered steel | and frock | of mail  
*Hexasyll.* Ada|mante|an proof :

Hardly anything here needs remark, except the use made of the old catalectic octosyllable beloved from *Comus* days, with its trochaic cadence, and that of half-Alexandrines or hexasyllables. There is only one monometer, towards the centre or *waist* of the scheme.



in *Paradise Regained*, and which some people call "reversal of stress."<sup>1</sup>

Instances may be found in 579—

Better at home lie bed-rid, not only idle,

which no system makes really harmonious ; line 748—

Out ! out ! hyæna : these are thy wonted arts,

which hardly any system but ours can explain satisfactorily ; line 797—

No better way I saw than by inportuning,

which is almost certainly an Alexandrine ; line 842—

Or by evasions thy crime uncover'st more,

where the strict decasyllable needs the impossible  
"ēvasns" ; line 868—

Private respects must yield with grave authority,

an Alexandrine more certain than ever ; and the very curious triplet of redundancy in 938-940—

If in my flower of youth and strength, when all men  
Loved, honoured, feared me ; thou alone could hate me,  
Thy husband, slight me, sell me, and forego me.

If these are not experiments, and experiments in strict foot-system with equivalence and substitution, I do not know what they are, unless you class them with all the other things reserved and most of those noted as "anomalies," which is simply confession and avoidance.

Let us call a halt now. It is not surprising that certain of the lines quoted from *Paradise Regained*, supplemented as they are by many others also cited in

<sup>1</sup> I have ventured below to image forth the effect produced on my ear and mind by accentual scansion with the aid of the shunting-yard. For a pendant as to this (to me rather absurd) phrase I must recur to the tin soldiers beloved of all properly constituted children. Can any one fail to remember how, when one had carefully arranged them in a row, they would, at a touch of a hasty sleeve or something similar, tumble against each other in different directions, and refuse to "dress"? This is just what the "reversed stresses" do.

*Samson Agonistes*, have somewhat disturbed the believers in a systematic and rigidly observed "elision" in Milton. Such lines in *Paradise Regained* as

And all the flourishing works of peace destroy (iii. 80),

Whose offspring in his posterity yet serve (iii. 375),

and

Thy politic maxims or that cumbersome (iii. 400),

with the *Samson* example just given, are clearly not reconcilable with the limitations sometimes tabulated. No wonder that a candid believer should admit that they look as if this theory had been quite discarded. But would it not be more reasonable and equally fair to say that they look as if such a theory had never been held, or had been held merely as a stage to a wider one? Remember that the simple theory of trisyllabic feet is equally applicable to *both*—that it makes no more difficulty with the one than with the other, and sets both in harmony. Remember too that there need not be the slightest difficulty in admitting development in Milton's use of trisyllabic foot-emancipation, to some progressive extent, from the gyves of apostrophation and the strict iambic heresy. Remember, further, that even in *Paradise Lost* the precisians of elision have had to admit exceptions which were sure to pullulate. Remember, finally, how they advance the exceedingly double-edged argument that in *Paradise Lost* the exceptions are most common in those syllables which experience shows to be oftenest and best used for trisyllabic places. And join to the remembrance that what *must* have been before him—the trisyllabic practice of Shakespeare—is absolutely unlimited. To the person who will keep these things in mind it should be superfluous to dwell on them.

But let us return for a moment to the actual examination of *Samson*. The central passage, the *clou* for the whole study of the play as far as its apparent anomalies go, is the great and famous one at the opening of the Chorus after Harapha's departure—

Oh, how comely it is, and how reviving,  
To the spirits of just men long oppressed,  
When God into the hands of their oppressor  
Puts invincible might.

It might have been thought that this passage would speak trumpet-tongued—that anybody possessed of any knowledge of Latin would see that Milton was imitating the “fantastical dainty metre” of the Catullian hendecasyllabic. But no! Inversions of stress, exchanges of accustomed rhythm for unaccustomed—all sorts of tricks, as fantastical, but not as dainty—seem to suggest themselves to those who will not accept the plain doctrine—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever—of English prosody, since English was English. It is perfectly certain that Milton is playing his part as the Abdiel of the classical-metre craze. I would give something, little as I care for biographical details, to know whether he had read Campion—but it does not much matter. The note on the verse in *Paradise Lost*, and the observation on the *Pyrrha*, give one quite sufficient information. In these choruses he is evidently making his last and boldest experiment, to see if he cannot merely enlarge but change the bounds of English metre. It is the way of the reformer. He fails magnificently; but he fails. He produces some exquisite curiosities, but he establishes no precedent. For once the comic verdict has no absurdity in it: “Not guilty; but don’t do it again!”<sup>1</sup>

The other most remarkable passage, equally famous and equally striking, is much less homogeneous and more questionable. It consists of the opening lines of the Semi-chorus triumph over the destruction of the Philistines—

<sup>1</sup> I have sometimes thought that a stanza of this kind may have struck him as worth trying, in order to get still nearer to Latin kinds than he had done in *Pyrrha*. I do not know whether any one has noticed that it is easy enough to English *Pyrrha* exactly—

What boy elegant with many a rose now thee  
Courts, while perfumes around everywhere drop from him?  
For whom bind’st thou thy golden locks,  
Pyrrha, cool in a grotto?

But it is very ugly, like all its kind.

While their hearts were jocund and sublime,  
 Drunk with idolatry, drunk with wine,  
 And fat regorged of bulls and goats.

Now, here there is nothing like the almost indisputable and self-imposing metrical character of the first piece. Are we to take it trochaically, with the second line a sort of cabriole or somersault of that dactyl which is the natural expansion of the trochee as the anapæst is of the iamb, but subsiding into iambics in the third line? After this the lines continue as thus—

Chaunting their idol, and preferring  
 Before our living Dread, who dwells  
 In Silo, his bright sanctuary,

and so forth, soberly enough.

Or, remembering that there is elsewhere a parallel to the first line in l. 606—

O that torment should not be confined,

are we to take

While their hearts were jocund and sublime

as an imitation on Milton's part of the Chaucerian "acephalous" niner, and remembering that Milton often plays tricks with "idolatry" and its congeners, scan the next—

Drunk | with i|dola|try, drunk | with wine,

so that there will be no real or important divergence from the iambic basis throughout? Either way is possible.

There can be no doubt that if we take the second, the appearance of the two acephalous lines (knowing, as we do, that Milton knew his Chaucer well, and knowing further, as we do, what admirable use he had made of the acephalous octosyllable) is very interesting. But whichever we take, and whatever other of the *Samson* oddments we add to these, we still have, in both and in all, a further document of Milton's unconquerable tendency to experimentalise. He had begun with the anapæstic

ending in *Comus*; he continued with all the lines which have been made subjects of question in *Paradise Lost*. He widened his range a little—though not, I think, on any new principle—in *Paradise Regained*; and in *Samson Agonistes* he “makes the jump,” as the French say, into entirely new combinations. But let it be observed that here also he keeps his singular method. The earlier choruses, and parts of Samson’s own speeches, are strictly iambic in basis, though irregular in length. The cases where it is difficult to maintain that basis are very few. The cases where it is simply out of the question are almost limited to a single one. Of this one it may perhaps be permissible to use the old theological caution (quite in Milton’s way) as to the death-repentance of the penitent thief. Milton gives it that none may despair of new possibilities in English metre. He gives no more, that none may presume on reckless and hazardous experiment.

But we must return again. The anomalies which we have been surveying, or some of them, have struck students of various degrees of competence and intelligence from very early times; and constant efforts have been made to explain, or at any rate to “regiment” them. Most of these efforts, and their authors, will find sufficient place in the “Prosodist” chapters as those authors occur. But there is one late and great exception which must be dealt with here. By far the most important and the most thorough-going, as well as one of the latest of those which I cannot accept, is that of Mr. Robert Bridges. It would seem to appear to some people (who, I suppose, translate their own practice into a rule for others) that to preface a criticism with a salute is a sort of tongue-in-cheek ceremony, if not even a Judas-like trick. That has not been the idea entertained by gentlemen in England at any time of our history; and it is not mine. When I say that I have had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Bridges for some forty years; that I have held him for the last dozen of them as our “next poet” in English, and for thirty at least as one of our best; that I recognise

Attempts to  
systematise  
apparent  
anomaly.

to the full the scholarship and the taste which accompany his great poetical gifts; that I know no one who has more "fulfilled all numbers" in literature,—I speak not more "magnificently" than sincerely. But the complement of *Amicus Plato* still abides as the rule for all servants of the Muses of whatever degree; and that the highest poetical faculty, backed by scholarship, will not necessarily make a poet infallible when he proceeds from practice to theory is sufficiently proved by no less final instances than that of Milton himself in the matter of rhyme, and that of Wordsworth in the case of Poetic Diction. The following is, I believe, a true abstract of Mr. Bridges' views on the prosody of *Paradise Lost*, as given in the last edition of his work on the subject.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Bridges' view.

A typical blank-verse line has ten syllables, five stresses, and a rising rhythm.

There may be an extra syllable, and even two, at the end of the line; but Milton in *Paradise Lost*, though not in *Comus*, does not allow it elsewhere, eliding it where it seems to occur.

Elision extends to words in *-ion*, *-ience*, etc.; "open" vowels, *i.e.* vowels coming before another or an *h*, either in the same word or in the next, while *w* and *wh* for *h* may be disregarded; "unstressed" vowels before *r*; "spirit" sometimes but not always, and "misery," with adjectives in *-able* are made the subject of special exceptions; unstressed vowels before pure *l* ("evil" an exception); vowels before pure *n* when final (not necessarily when not final); and some others.

Some lines have only *four*, and some probably only *three* stresses.

There is in Milton much "inverted rhythm," which may occur in every foot or stress-division, and in more than one.

Discussion of it.

I have purposely made this summary as simple as possible to avoid ostentation of complexity. But it will hardly be denied that it *is* rather complex; and it cannot

<sup>1</sup> Oxford, 1901. The important dealing in this book with the English hexameter will not here concern us.

be denied at all that it proceeds on the general theory that Milton first adopted a strict system and then gave himself easements from it in divers directions. Wherever an apparent breach of the "ten syllable, five stress, rising rhythm" norm occurs, you have got to devise an explanation, or at least a classification, of the licence; and sometimes even your explanations and classifications will not hold good, and you must have an "exception." Now I venture to think it unnecessary to urge at any great length, that *prima facie* the simpler explanation is always to be preferred to the more complex; that the more numerous the epicycles and *privilegia* required for special cases, the less probable is the theory which requires them; that, in short, one master-key is a great deal better than a whole bunch of jingling picklocks. And I believe that master-key to be provided by the system of foot-scansion, with equivalence and substitution, which has been championed throughout this book. I have allowed that trisyllabic feet had been and were still discouraged in theory, for a generation or two before and during Milton's time; and, what is more, I have shown the cause of this discouragement. But I have shown also that they had existed ever since English poetry became English, and were only "driven in" by the mistaken theory itself.

On our system, instead of a tangle of rule and exception, everything becomes perfectly simple. Milton is writing on a norm of five-foot lines, which admits the various forms, long-short, short-long, long-long, short-short-long, and possibly here and there long-short-short and short-short-short (this rather doubtfully), just as does the Greek trimeter with which he was so well acquainted, but on a freer system of equivalence, and with the final redundant syllable allowed at pleasure. Very occasionally he allows himself, as Virgil had done in his hexameters, a fragment of a line, very occasionally what may be an Alexandrine. But generally he confines himself to the so-called decasyllable—really to the five-foot line. His business is with this, with the equivalence of feet, with the shifting of pause, and with the superior

Contrast of it  
with our  
system.

concerting effect which we have called the verse paragraph—to make as harmonious lines as he can. He makes them; the few exceptions dealt with or to be dealt with presently requiring no *privilegium*, no extension of, or exception to, system, but being simply experiments, more or less successful, under that system, and in the carrying out of it. I think a few of them—very few—are *not* quite successful; and I should be very much surprised if the case were otherwise. But I think that the enormous majority, “not five in five score, but” at least ninety-four and nineteen-twentieths “more,” *are*<sup>1</sup> successful, and that they form the great justification and exemplification of our theory. Only by feet, equivalence, and substitution can you explain Milton’s prosody in a manner worthy of Milton, as a natural, harmonious, consistent process, and not as a tissue of provisos and saving clauses—of Admiralty orders overruling the Articles of War, after the fashion ignored by innocent Mr. Midshipman Easy, and of subordinate officers producing sealed commissions from their pockets, after the fashion in reference to which D’Artagnan brought a blush to the cheek of Louis the Magnificent.

The printing  
argument.

For the peculiarities of printing I have, I must confess, very little respect, though, as I have shown and shall hope to show, they are by no means fatal to my theory in themselves. To begin with, Milton was blind when he wrote (or at least printed) the *Paradises* and *Samson*. It is hard enough to get an elaborate and rather arbitrary system of will-printing carried out when you can see. In the second place, I have myself, as the phrase goes, “seen too many others.” During the last few years especially I have been reading—reading narrowly, and in a literal sense literally—dozens of books, scores of thousands of lines, written by Milton’s contemporaries, and printed in his very times. The result has informed me, once for all, that “apostrophation” was a trick, and almost a fetich, of the day; it has informed me likewise

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps I ought (though it is sad to think it necessary) to remind the reader of Porson and “The Germans in Greek.”



that it was a fetich most capriciously, as well as most extravagantly, worshipped. I could give many examples;<sup>1</sup> but the reader, unless he likes to go through what I have gone through, will hardly appreciate the certainty of the conclusion. Yet this certainty is clenched, endorsed, made absolute by the fact that the very printing of *Paradise Lost* does *not* bear out what it is supposed to bear out—that it actually contradicts itself again and again, and that it omits almost more strikingly than it contradicts.

When the two systems come to be applied, the difference of their results must no doubt be subject to the grand caution—*De gustibus*——. There may be people whose ears are not offended by “om’nous” and “pop’lar,” by “thupright,” and by

Abominablunutterabl and worse,

instead of the smoothly flowing, musically rippling measure and murmur of the trisyllabically admixed cadence. But the doctrines of stress-omission and inversion seem to lead to even stranger results. I cannot understand how any one can not merely propose to scan with trochaic endings

Beyond all past example and future

(where *fütürus* was evidently sitting at Milton’s ear rather Satanically), and

Which of us who beholds the bright surface

(where, as evidently, he was mentally *separating* the syllables and giving “face” its usual value), but can actually see beauty in the latter.<sup>2</sup> But the *omission* of stresses gives the strangest results of all. To make

As in luxurious cities, where the noise

a line of four stresses only ; much more

His ministers of vengeance and pursuit

<sup>1</sup> See *Minor Caroline Poets*, vols. i. and ii. Oxford, 1905-6.

<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps worth observing that “surmise,” “surprise,” and other dissyllabic noun-compounds with “sur-” keep the ultimate long.

a line of *three*, seems to me not only quite unnecessary—*my* five “feet” being perfectly perceptible in both—but unthinkable. I simply cannot read, hear, or see the one with four stresses and the other with three; the attempt to do so results, for me, in a mere welter of gabbled sound.

The “scanned  
not pro-  
nounced”  
argument.

It may, however, be said, “You are kicking (and that rather rudely) at an open door. Have you not Mr. Bridges’ explicit declaration that he does *not* think that there can be any doubt whether elided syllables should be pronounced? Does he not go so far as to say, ‘Though Milton printed “Th’ Almighty,” it cannot be supposed that he wished it to be so pronounced’? and yet more, ‘In English the open vowel is always pronounced’? Does he not yet further admit that Milton’s own practice ‘is somewhat inconsistent and arbitrary’?” Most certainly: these citations are true citations. I have been acquainted with the statements ever since they were made, and have always determined that, should I ever have occasion to handle the matter, they should be prominently acknowledged. But I must observe, in the first place, that whatever Mr. Bridges may admit, his predecessors in the same theory of scansion did *not* admit this. Dryden, who was contemporary with Milton for two-thirds of his own life, who had projected a treatise on Prosody, and who had not improbably talked with Milton on the subject, lays down, *totidem verbis*, that “no vowel can be cut off when we cannot sink the pronunciation of it.” The great Bysshe, whom it is the fashion to pooh-pooh and keep in the background (as is the case also with Guest, because both had the complete but maladroit courage of their opinions), is entirely explicit on the subject; and he did no more than boldly formulate what generations believed. “Beauteous,” he says, “is two syllables, ‘victorious’ is three”; and he (from his own point of view, justly) scolds Milton for making “riot” one syllable, which it certainly cannot be unless you pronounce it “rot” or “rite.” Bysshe I understand. I think him wrong to a ghastly extent—hideously and hatefully wrong. But I comprehend his theory; I know

whence it arose and what it meant; I think that if you take his premisses—which I am so far from taking—it is a logical and a necessary conclusion. Moreover, his predecessors, his contemporaries and students, and the majority of the next three generations so understood him, though they agreed with him; others, like Shenstone, so understood him, though they had the sense to disagree with him. The printers who printed “watry” and “tendring,” whether with or without the apostrophe, held the same theory and meant to express it. To them these contractions were either not ugly, or, ugly or not, were a deliberate sacrifice to a theory of metre. I repeat that I understand them thoroughly, and confess them to be consistent. I should like to say, “Off with their heads!” but that is different.

Heaven forbid that I should say, “Off with Mr. Bridges’ head!” but I must admit that his position is to me quite incomprehensible. Pronounce these syllables and you have trisyllabic feet at once—all the trisyllabic feet that I want, and all that I contend for. But, it seems, you must, under some strange theory of divorce of scansion and pronunciation, say that they are not trisyllabic feet. Why? The ecclesiastic, in the *fabliau* so often related and utilised, who thanked Heaven “for this good carp” when he was eating his Friday capon, had a very obvious, and from his point of view sufficient, reason for his direct freedom with zoology, and his indirect one with syllables. But what is *prosodically* gained by calling “capon” “carp” or “caviare” “capon”? by pronouncing “riot” as “riot” and scanning it as “rot”? I cannot for the very life of me see what is the object or the purpose of these prosodic fictions.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes I have thought that the influence of music (which, as I have more than once hinted, seems to me generally detrimental to sound prosodic views) may have had something to do with

<sup>1</sup> Of course it may be said that the whole thing is merely a logomachy—that Mr. Bridges’ system of elision is after all only one of *classifying* the occurrences of “trisyllabic feet,” etc. But I must repeat my appeal to Bysshism. The system (or something very like it) “has deceived *our* fathers and may *us*.”

the matter. When a man is accustomed to the trans-  
mogrification of

When the bloom is on the rye  
into

When the bloo-hoo-hoom is o-ho-hon the rye,

it may seem to him immaterial whether you pronounce  
"ominous" and scan "om'nous," whether, in your desire  
to find only "three stresses" in

His min|isters | of ven|geance and | pursuit,

you stagger wildly from "His min |" to "isters of ven |"  
and thence to "-geance and purs̄uit."

For my part, as I have said again and again, prosodic  
arrangements are to me merely the systematisation of the  
way in which a man, familiar with the language and of  
trained ear, reads good poetry to himself or others. I  
have no need of the rack or of the knife of Procrustes,  
of the orb or of the epicycle of Ptolemy; just as, on the  
other hand, I have no organs which will enable me to  
patter or skate over three short syllables in

And in lūxū|rious cities where the noise,

till I clutch, panting, the blessed *u* of "-ūrious."

I have compared scansion of this kind before to a  
drunkard staggering from post to post; and it also much  
resembles an unskilful hurdle-racer taking his jumps now  
too short and now too long. But the most perfect simile  
to my fancy is one the material of which most people  
know who have been unlucky enough to be quartered in a  
railway hotel on the side overlooking a shunting yard.  
They will remember how, in the dead waist and middle  
of the night, they were aroused, and kept awake till it was  
time to get up, by something like this—

RAM ! - - - - ra-RAM ! - - - ra-ra-RAM ! - - - RAM-ra-RAM ! - - ra-  
RAM-ra ! - - - RAM !

That is the tune of accentual scansion in its altitudes.

But it has also and further occurred to me, as of

course it must have occurred to others, that this preference of fiction over fact may be due to some confusion with classical practice, though, as a rule, the very people who most object to trisyllabic feet, to foot-scanion generally, are also those who object to the use, in English, of the terms of classical prosody itself. Now, putting this aside, and putting aside also the minor difficulties of that practice itself, such as the indication of elision in Greek and its partial non-indication in Latin,<sup>1</sup> there is in this connection a much greater puzzle. Suppose that Milton did wish to imitate at once the Greek practice of scrupulously indicating elision, and the Latin practice of at least sometimes not indicating it but arranging the metrical scheme as if it were indicated. Suppose, further, to stretch concession as far as possible, that he believed the Romans, if not the Greeks also, to have pronounced what they did not scan. After all this a huger difficulty occurs. Elision, both in Greek and in Latin, is fairly universal under its own rules. There are, of course, a few instances of permitted hiatus, but they are very few in proportion and are generally in somewhat exceptional circumstances. But Milton observes no such uniformity. He may "elide" the *e* of "the" rather oftener than he leaves it unquestionably hiant; but that, on my theory, needs no explanation, because he thereby gets the trisyllabic foot he wants. At any rate, he never hesitates *not* to "elide" it. He may make "Spirit," dissyllabic as I take it, a pyrrhic<sup>2</sup> rather oftener than he makes it an iambus, but he never hesitates to do the latter; the same with "Heaven"; the same *mutatis mutandis* with "evil." On the trisyllabic system, once more, there is no reason why he should not do so; on the strict dissyllabic there is much. So with "-able"; so with the liquid-followed

Classical  
parallels and  
comparisons.

<sup>1</sup> I suspect, however, and may possibly again touch on the suspicion, that this *has* a good deal to do with the matter: and I design to deal also with the Italian practice of elision. But sometimes, when I hear people dwelling on Milton's "Italianation," I cannot help thinking of those brave and beautiful verses of Peacock's about "oak and beech." You never can teach John Milton—he never could teach himself, though he may have tried—to be aught but an English poet.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* in *itself*, not a pyrrhic foot.

vowels, for which some of our flamens devise such "service quaint"; so with *io* and *oa* and *ae*. On the one theory it is all right: they are always two, and he adds a third or not as the rhythm leads him. On the other they are sometimes two gentlemen in one and sometimes two gentlemen in two, at a purely arbitrary choice. Which is the more reasonable?

The true  
prosodic  
position  
of Milton.

When, in short, we discard, on the one hand, non-natural imaginings, and, on the other, the earless or eyeless cavil, idol-begot, of the Bysshes and even the Johnsons; when we subject Milton's prosody to the plain and simple system which we have seen establishing itself from the very first, and shall see confirmed to the latest syllable of recorded English verse,—all difficulties vanish, all cumbrous etiquettes and ceremonies disappear, and we are face to face not only with one of the most perfect developments of English prosody itself, but in a certain sense—and only a certain sense—with its final development. It took, as it were, a lease of three lives, and a sequence of three works, to effect this final estatment; leaving, of course, the development of the estate itself open to endless possibilities. Spenser, completing the task of his humbler predecessors, restored and reconstituted English poetry once for all from the chaos of doggerel, but in so doing deprived it of a certain amount of freedom, "kept it up" very tight, and hardly, after the *Kalendar*, essayed the looser measures. Shakespeare, availing himself of the almost infinite possibilities of blank verse on the one hand, and not neglecting those of other metres, restored and vastly enlarged freedom itself. But his successors<sup>1</sup> loosened and liquefied blank verse yet further into sloppy doggerel, almost as bad as, if not worse than, the worst fifteenth-sixteenth-century mixture; and although they wrote exquisite lyric, "turned it to prettiness" too often. Then Milton, applying the astringent of his austere beautiful style, and the widely conditioned but never slipshod order of his measures, tightened things up again, yet with all adequate possibilities of easement.

<sup>1</sup> Those to whom we are coming, not those with whom we have dealt.

There is, of course, much difference in his verse, as in his style; and one might have thought that this difference would act as a warning to those who, as in Chaucer's case, insist on a cast-iron uniformity in this respect, a uniformity ungracious in itself, and not reasonably exigible from, or imponible on, a poet's work. From the liquid lapses of *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Comus*; from the absolutely golden mean, between ease and stateliness, of *Lycidas*, to the almost harsh and certainly austere modulation of parts of *Samson*, is a far cry indeed. But we have dealt with the stages already. Here it is only necessary to dwell, and that briefly, on the varied perfection of the result, and on the immense importance of it as a sealed pattern and standing example to all future writers. Throughout the days of ignorance and apostrophation, in this respect as in others, Shakespeare and Milton remained the Jachin and the Boaz of the temple of true English prosody, between whom any who chose could enter. The very people who reproved them admitted their greatness; the very reproofs could not but suggest to an ingenuous Shenstone or a forerunning Cowper that it was the reprovers, not the reproved, who were wrong. Did anybody make a fetich of exactly corresponding metre? The trochaic lines of the smaller poems showed his folly as soon "as judging by the result" was attempted. Did any one lay it down that ten syllables, and no more, are to go to an English heroic line? Hundreds of lines in *Paradise Lost* were there to sound cacophonously if you cut them down, musically if you left them alone. Did his own petulant malediction of rhyme cause Israel to sin? All the early pieces and not a little in *Samson* said, "Never mind what he *says* when he is a pedant in a pet; look what he *does* when he is a singer in his singing robes." And the whole work, from the *Nativity Ode* to *Samson* itself, from the *Arcades* choruses to the stately tirades of *Paradise Regained*, proclaims—one cannot say unmistakably, but in such a fashion that one can only marvel at any mistake—the three great laws of English prosody: Foot-arrangement, Substitution, and Equivalence.

I shall indeed be so very bold as to claim Milton, not merely—as I claim every one from Godric to Tennyson—as evidence of the truth of the system here championed, but as an open-eyed and intentional practitioner of it. Such a practitioner hardly exists<sup>1</sup> before Spenser; and Spenser, though I believe he always scanned by feet, was evidently, after his earlier experiments in the *Kalendar*, somewhat shy of equivalence and substitution, which indeed were not much wanted, and might have been dangerous if too freely used, in his great stanza. That Shakespeare thought of his scansion, except in a general way as more and more expressing and satisfying the demands of an impeccable ear, I do not affirm or deny, because I believe it to be absolutely unsafe to affirm or deny anything about what Shakespeare consciously did. But from the passages in the Sonnets and in the very defiance gloved up on the front of *Paradise Lost*, from the general character of the scansion (especially the blank-verse scansion) of the successive poems, and still more from a feature to be noticed presently, I do believe that Milton *deliberately* scanned his verse as I scan it—if not to the minutest detail, yet in all general points of foot-division, equivalence, and substitution. I am not only sure that no other so well accounts for the actual result: I do not believe that any other will account at all for the production of that result, and especially for the production of some of the least, as of the most, absolutely delectable points in it. For I am by no means prepared to go to the length of some Miltonolaters, and to regard his metrical experiments as impeccably harmonious. Far be it from me to fall into the gainsaying of Guest, and quarrel with his most beautiful lines because they are “against every principle” of this or that theory of scansion. On the contrary, I have said generally that if a theory of scansion and the judgment of a good ear conflict, the theory must give way. The things that I less love in Milton do not conflict with my theory, but

<sup>1</sup> I may perhaps refer to the Preface for some remarks on the singular ideas apparently entertained by some persons on this subject.



the contrary ; and seeing that I can quite comprehend, I can almost pardon though I do not like them. A great many things hideous to me on the other system become quite agreeable, and sometimes exquisitely beautiful, on mine ; but it leaves some disagreeable. It has to account for this, and I think it does.

It is, at any rate, perfectly ready to do so. Wherever there occurs in Milton a line that the allowance of trisyllabic feet will not make harmonious, the result will, I believe, be found to be due to some use of substitution theoretically correct, but in result and the particular case unsuccessful. Now I have kept throughout the proviso, extended and suspended, that each language has its own mysterious metrical decencies and indecencies, and that these are, to my theories of versification and to all others, what the Fates were to Zeus. Milton, always impatient of control, tried, I think, to defy the Fates (like Burgoyne at Saratoga), and sometimes with a similar result. His defiances appear to me sometimes simple experiments—the strange hit-or-miss fugues and toccatas of the *Samson* choruses pretty certainly were so,—and if he had lived they would almost certainly have been turned into the things of beauty that some of them are nearly or already, as it is. In one particular, too, he was always under an influence which was dangerous, and that was his affection for Italian, and the ruling Italian foot, the trochee. He had got beautiful effects out of mixed iambic and trochaic scansion in separate lines and in the octosyllabic<sup>1</sup> as early almost as he got out of his poetic nonage, and he seems always to have been hankering after something of the same sort in the longer line. To this are due his choriambic endings, his ditrochaic and antispastic beginnings. There are not a few who say they like these, and perhaps some who really do. I cannot say that I do,<sup>2</sup> though, as I have said, they are

<sup>1</sup> Compare again Chaucer and the “acephalous” line.

<sup>2</sup> Thus I have no affection for his “bottomless pit” whether it be “bottomless” or “bottom̄less” ; and I think “universal reproach,” whether it be “universal̄” or “universal,” “far worse to bear” in another sense than

perfectly justifiable as experiments on my theory, which passes them over, duly *visés*, to the higher tribunal of the ear. The same is the case with an occasional accumulation of trisyllabic feet, sometimes running close to the tribrach, and with the other accumulation, close together, of redundantly ended lines. I dare say I may be wrong in disliking these, but at any rate I am not "doing injustice by a law." My law licenses them all.

Conclusion on  
uncontentious  
points.

There are, fortunately, points of Milton's prosody which lie apart from this peculiar and probably irreconcilable debate. His use of pause is unique. Like Shakespeare, he will put it anywhere or nowhere, so as to achieve those "periods of a declaimer" which disturbed Dr. Johnson, bereft of his accustomed warning-bell of rhyme to tell him he was reading poetry. But (and I do not think that this has been quite so much noticed as it should have been) Milton does not, like Shakespeare, make the lines embrace and intertwine in the marvellous manner which constitutes the final secret of blank verse of the particular kind, and which, as a matter of fact, has never been quite recovered. His old fancy for the self-enclosed line of the Marlowe group seems in a manner to have persisted, though he subdues it wonderfully to the purposes of the verse paragraph. His use of that paragraph was no doubt suggested (though, it may be, quite unconsciously) by Shakespeare; but the contrast of dramatic and narrative requirements, as well as something in the two men, differentiates it. It is not Milton's way to wind up a paragraph to the highest soar of possibility and then let it "stoop" suddenly as in those ineffable triumphs of versification which close *Othello*. The verse paragraphs of Milton are more like the prose paragraphs of Hooker, which rise, keep level perhaps for a time, and then gently slope to their conclusion. Sometimes he arrests the slope a little before the actual lower limit; but he seldom finishes off with an artificial flourish,

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the original. Others are open to no sound objection, and some are beautiful exceedingly. But they are beauties, not indeed in the least "monstrous" in kind, but somewhat hazardous in the individual instance.

as Thomson, in imitating him, too often did. We shall have to wait for Tennyson before we can find any third-man for Shakespeare and Milton in the use of this device ; but it was Milton who distinctly indicated it as a special resource to English poets.

In another he has no rival in English ; while Hugo, the only possible one elsewhere, is much more uncertain in his use of it, and sometimes grotesque. This, it need hardly be added, is the use of the proper name. If we combine the tenets of the austerer sects or wings of Christianity on both sides, the doctrine that intense enjoyment of carnal things is sin with that of Purgatory, it is to be feared that Milton must have found the "milder shades" not so mild in respect of his indulgence in this pleasure. He simply intoxicates himself, and all his readers who have the luck to be susceptible of the intoxication, with the honey, or rather the "Athole brose," of this marvellous name-accompaniment. To the comparatively simple instances of it in *Comus* and *Lycidas* may be added :—the Hebraic titles of the demon-gods and their shrines almost at the opening of *Paradise Lost* ; the Fable- or Romance-names later ; the shorter passage in Satan's voyage, and that couplet almost equalling the earlier in *Lycidas*—

Blind Thamyras and blind Maeonides  
And Tiresias and Phineus—prophets of old ;

the inhabitants of Limbo ; the earthly Paradises in Book IV. ; others, though perhaps less conspicuous, in the central Books, down to the geographical illustrations of the bridge-building of Sin and Death, and those others of the change of nature after the Fall, and the gorgeous catalogue of what was *not* seen from the Mount of Speculation to which the archangel took Adam. The taste, too, seems to have grown upon him, for short as is *Paradise Regained* it contains—in the passage of the tempter's feast, in the panoramas of Parthia, with the final reference to the *Orlando*, and the parallel ones of Rome and Athens—masterpieces of the kind, sometimes

extra-illustrated with alliteration as in the famous and delightful

Knights of Logres and of Lyonesse,  
Lancelot and Pelleas and Pellenore,

which Tennyson imitated less wisely than well.

And so let us leave, with words in which all may agree, the last of the Four Masters of English Prosody.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BATTLE OF THE COUPLETS

The main currents of mid-seventeenth-century prosody—The use of the couplet—The pioneers—Fairfax—Sir John Beaumont—Sandys—The first main practitioners—Waller—Characteristics of his smoothness—His other metres—Their moral as to the couplet—Cowley—His curious position—His couplet generally—The *Davidels*—His own principles—His lyrics—Denham—The opposite or enjambed form—Chalkhill, Marmion, and Chamberlayne—The constitutive difference of the two styles—Dangers of enjambment—Note on the two couplets.

THAT Milton is the greatest single figure prosodically, as he is poetically, in the mid-seventeenth century, is undeniable. But his prosodic *influence* was not actually exerted till long after this time, and he does not represent any of the actual prosodic movements or phenomena which were most characteristic of the day. These movements or phenomena were, in the main, three—all of great importance—the Battle of the Couplets, the break-up of Blank Verse, and the culmination of Lyric. To them we must now turn.

The main currents of mid-seventeenth-century prosody.

The present chapter will be arranged in accordance with the general method of presenting, as far as possible, a chronologically continuous account of the prosodic performance of individuals, but of grouping, with a certain "before-and-after" licence, exemplars of specially remarkable prosodic developments. That is to say, it will refer to some things which saw the light during the period of the last Book, and, it may be, to some that have been already mentioned there, in order to survey

intelligibly what is perhaps the main prosodic phenomenon of the first two-thirds of the seventeenth century—the emergence of the decasyllabic couplet as the staple metre of English poetry; the flourishing side by side for a while of its two forms, the overlapped and the self-contained; and the final triumph of the latter. This last stage we shall not here reach; the other two will be our immediate province.

The use of the couplet.

We have seen in the first volume that the couplet, if not of the very beginnings—the earth-born originals—of strictly English prosody, makes attempts to be born as early as the *Orison of Our Lady*, figures in the “heap” of twelfth- and thirteenth-century measures, and shows itself pretty frequently, if accidentally, in Hampole and in the anonymous poems of the Vernon and other MSS. during the fourteenth. It is finally established by Chaucer in something like both its forms, or rather in a form which very readily becomes either, though the temporary prevalence of the redundant syllable is against the sharpest-cut outline of ridge-backed stop.

We saw, further, that this latest and in a sense greatest triumph of Chaucer's art was comparatively little followed by his actual followers, and that those who did attempt it were almost more unlucky than with rhyme-royal. In fact, nothing shows the “staggers” of this period quite so well (and therefore so ill) as the couplet, and nothing could, unless it were blank verse, which was not then written. The octosyllable is so short, has so many licences, and can be so easily botched off after a fashion, with *cliché* rhymes and expletives, that it offers little difficulty to the *mediocris poeta*; and rhyme-royal itself is long enough to give that poet a sort of chance (in the old provincial phrase) of “odding it till it comes even.” But the couplet is at once long enough to admit, and too short to hide, the most gruesome deformities and anomalies. The early practice of it in the next century on the stage probably did not a little good, for nobody could *speak* couplets like some of Lydgate's without being sensible of their ugliness. And as soon

as the strict belief in iambic feet, "keeping of accent" and the like, came in, the couplet began to be possible, and was sure to be practised. This same belief made directly, and at last successfully, for the stopped form; but it could not be admitted at once. The stanza, with its comparatively ample space, had got too much into the poetic blood of Englishmen, and they could not at once give up elbow-room. Accordingly in Spenser, Drayton, Daniel, and others, as we have seen, the character is still somewhat undetermined; it is only after the beginning of the seventeenth century that it begins to differentiate itself in an unmistakable way. Of the special stopped form, not of course the actual genesis but the intermediate origin may still be assigned, with fair if not absolute exactness, to a name already consecrated by tradition.

Whether the reader, who comes to the perusal of Fairfax's *Tasso* with a remembrance of the praises which have been bestowed upon it by poets and critics of various times and tastes, will or will not experience something of disappointment in regard to actual poetic pleasure, is a question which may be posed, but need not be discussed. The prosodic importance of this painful translator and father of witch-beset virgins<sup>1</sup> is quite undeniable. It is, in fact, constituted irrefragably by the fact of Dryden's well-known assertion that Waller told him that he had been influenced by Fairfax. If, therefore, he was no poet's poet he was a reformer's reformer. And let nobody interject any doubt about Waller's actual part in a certain rather questionable "reform of our numbers." The people who followed that reform believed<sup>2</sup> in his part in it for a century and a half, and that is the point of importance. We may make a new translation-application of *possunt quia posse videntur*, and say that the

The pioneers  
—Fairfax.

<sup>1</sup> See the curious story in Scott's *Demonology* or in Fairfax's own *Daemonologia* (ed. Laing, Harrogate, 1882).

<sup>2</sup> There is a very curious instance of Waller-idolatry in the verse prefixed by Robert Gould to the 1682 edition of Fairfax himself—

Let Waller be our standard, all beyond,  
Though spoke at court, is foppery and fond.

influence which is acknowledged is evidently an influence which exists. It is not necessary to waste words on the illusory objection that Fairfax, writing in stanza, could hardly have much to do with the introduction of the couplet. He *did* write in stanza; but his stanza was the octave with couplet close, and it is evident from the very first that he was inclined—and did not resist his inclination—to isolate this.<sup>1</sup> Tasso himself had not commonly run his stanzas into one another, even to the extent of allowing less than a full stop at the end; and his sixth lines, though they admit a little more licence, are generally full-stopped also. Fairfax enjambes the sixth a little more, but is punctilious about the eighth. Now we saw that Chaucer's practice, in stanza which also has a couplet ending, probably had much to do with, and was certainly followed by, his adoption of the couplet alone. In Fairfax's case the follower (save in the small degree noted) was not himself; but the process was the same.

Moreover, it so happened that Fairfax, by choice or insensibly, fell into a mould of line and couplet which was much closer to the stopped antithetic ridge-backed variety of this latter than anything in Chaucer. A selection below,<sup>2</sup> beginning with the very second stanza of the poem, will show this; but there has been no need to select the specimens with any care, for they are not the exception, but the rule. There can be little doubt of the

<sup>1</sup> The edition just cited of *Daemonologia*, includes some eclogues of his own in sixain with final couplet; the others are in continuous couplet, though partly batched in fours.

<sup>2</sup> If fictions light I mix with Truth Divine  
And fill these lines with other praise than Thine. i. 2.  
We further seek what their offences be:  
Guiltless I quit; guilty I set them free. ii. 52.  
Thro' love the hazard of fierce war to prove,  
Famous for arms, but famous more for love. iii. 40.  
In fashions wayward, and in love unkind,  
For Cupid deigns not wound a currish mind. iv. 46.



effect which they—so early, let it be remembered, as 1600—must have produced on ears which, as we see from the result, were ready to hear. There can be less of that which this couplet, combined with a diction more modern than Spenser's, not by ten years but by nearly a hundred, must have had on later generations who did not mind modernised romance, or rather preferred it. For this very reason Fairfax may not be very refreshing now to some palates, which have no objection to Dryden or Pope, and which never weary of Spenser, but which do not care greatly for a watery compromise.

It is specially desirable to dwell a little on his diction as well as on his line, because we shall see that this is a very important element in the birth and progress of the stopped couplet itself. It cannot away with the slow, gorgeous, heavily vowelled tone and rhythm of the older vocabulary; it wants neat, curt, sharp locutions—colours which may be bright, but which must be decided and definitely contrasted, not iridescent or vaguely nuanced. Now Fairfax gives it what it wants. Poor Collins's malady was indeed an *amabilis insania* when it persuaded him that Fairfax and his "magic wonders" were in perfect harmony. There is a great deal more of prose and sense in Fairfax's numbers, and likewise in his phrase, than of "magic."

The demand to which this answered was put remarkably by another Jacobean poet, Sir John Beaumont, in a poem to the King "Concerning the True Form of English Poetry." This is, in fact, Sir John's principal title to an appearance here, though it is not always mentioned in accounts of him. It is unlucky that we do not know the exact date of the piece; but as it was addressed "to his late Majesty James I." it can hardly be later, and may be much earlier, than the earliest date that can possibly be claimed for the writing of Waller's "Santander" lines (*v. inf.*), while it must be years earlier than the appearance of those lines. The actual form of its couplets is noteworthy, but the sense conveyed in it is much more so.

Sir John  
Beaumont.

Sir John, speaking as to an expert in prosodic precept,<sup>1</sup> does not indeed say in so many words that the stopped couplet is the master metre, but this is evidently the sum and substance of what he means ; and if Pope had known the lines at the time when he wrote the *Essay on Criticism* he would probably have stolen them, or some of them. First, the author of *Bosworth Field* stigmatises "the other fellows"—

On halting feet the ragged poem goes  
With accents neither fitting verse nor prose—

a couplet for which his contemporary and "father" Ben would have hugged him, as the later Johnson felt inclined to do, even to his enemy Adam Smith, when he heard of his love for "rhyme." Indeed, after glancing disdainfully at

Holes where men may thrust their hands between,

Sir John goes on—

The relish of the Muse consists in rhyme :  
One verse must meet another like a chime.  
Our Saxon shortness hath peculiar grace  
In choice of words fit for the ending-place,  
Which leave impression in the mind as well  
As closing sounds of some delightful bell.

Not merely Johnson but the austere Bysshe himself would have applauded the sentiment—

In many changes these may be expressed :  
But those that join most simply run the best ;  
Their form, surpassing far the fettered staves,  
Vain care and needless repetition saves.

And Mr. Addison and Mr. Pope, nay their leader the great M. Boileau-Despréaux, contemptuous as he was of all things English, would have acclaimed and laurelled the man who in the depths of "the last age" dared to write in praise of

Pure phrase, fit epithets, a sober care  
Of metaphors, descriptions clear yet rare.

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<sup>1</sup> See the "Prosodists" chapter of the last Book.

It is not surprising that Mr. Courthope<sup>1</sup> should describe this "as an exact and critical conception of the nature of the poetic art," and should say that "a more admirable illustration of the classical spirit naturalised in English verse is not to be found in the range of English poetry." Substitute "neo-classic" for "classical" and I should say ditto to my friend very cheerfully.

Beaumont practised what he preached very fairly, but, unlike Waller (who, indeed, was considerably his junior), he could manage the "stave" without "fettering" it, and could show something of the powers which it has, beyond those of what might be more truly called the "fettered" couplet. But he hardly deserved addition to the list of poets in the third chapter of the last Book. Here his place is undeniable.<sup>2</sup>

If Beaumont has often been defrauded of his due Sandys. place among the vaunt-couriers of the stopped couplet, and if Drummond has been promoted a little hastily, another traditional pioneer, George Sandys, is perhaps again questionable, not so much in point of quality as of date. With the odd fatality which seems to hang about the chronology of this couplet, the exact appearance of his translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is uncertain. It seems to have been published in 1621, within the reign of James, and the usually accurate and trustworthy Haslewood describes a copy. But there is nothing in the British Museum earlier than the next edition of 1626—Caroline, not Jacobean; and Sandys's other couplet work—*Paraphrases* of Job, of Jeremiah, etc.—is distinctly later, while he certainly revised the *Ovid* very carefully in 1632. But these are not matters of much importance; and, once more, the position which Dryden assigns to Sandys is of itself important enough. Any-

<sup>1</sup> *History of English Poetry*, iii. 197 *sqq.* The poem itself may be found in Chalmers, vi. 30, 31. Of Beaumont's other pieces, *Bosworth Field* is couplet; but he has some good stanzas in an *Ode of the Blessed Trinity*, which perhaps had some influence on Milton's "Nativity," in 6, 6, 6, 6, 10, 12, *abbaba*, and in an *Epithalamium*, 10, 6, 12, 10, 8, 14, *abbaab*.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Courthope would bracket Drummond with him; but I scarcely think Drummond so far advanced.

body, however, who turns to Sandys's actual work (it should be said that the *Ovid* is not included in the standard modern edition, that of the Rev. R. Hooper in the *Library of Old Authors*) will see at once that, though he may have a strong *nisus* towards the stopped form—a *nisus* perhaps originally determined by his anxiety to represent Ovid as much line for line as possible,—he is under no preceptist scruples in his methods, and does not always attain any very great smoothness in his results, though he sometimes does. Enjambment is quite frequent, and the pause is varied almost as freely as in blank verse. But there is certainly a hammer-stroke of emphasis in him which does foretell Dryden.<sup>1</sup>

The first main  
practitioners—  
Waller.

Waller occupies—or has by turns occupied and been served with notice to quit—a place of such importance in prosodic history that, especially as his volume is not great, we may consider all his verse here under the head of the metre which gained him his distinction. I do not propose to take up much space with “verifying his powers” or discussing his title. There is, in fact, too much of the gold-and-silver shield business about the discussion to make it a profitable one. More than half the modern readers who are indignant with “Waller was smooth” are so because their ideal of smoothness and Pope’s or Johnson’s are two quite different things. And as there seems to be no means of ascertaining exactly when such pieces as the “Santander” poem were written, it skills very little to produce such and such a verse, or

<sup>1</sup> Compare the openings of Job I. and II.—

In Hus, a land which near the sun’s uprise  
And northern confines of Sabæa lies,  
A great example of perfection reigned,  
His name was Job, his soul with guilt unstained.

Again when all the radiant sons of light  
Before His throne appeared, Whose only sight  
Beatitude infused; the Inveterate Foe,  
In fogs ascending from the depth below,  
Profaned their blest assembly.

Sandys’s prosodic interest is not limited to the couplet. The metres of his Psalm Paraphrases are varied, and include several examples of the *In Memoriam* quatrain.

such and such verses, of Beaumont, Drummond, Fairfax, and others back to Drayton, or (as can be done) Spenser himself, which have the Wallerian quality. It can be done; it has been done here; and there's an end of it.

What is really important is that Waller *may* certainly have written such verses as these<sup>1</sup> as early as 1623-24; that these verses have a certain quality, and that this quality was what succeeding generations admired in him, thought that he had mainly discovered, and regarded as the standard of good verse—as what all verse had better be. Let us see what this model actually is.

The standard of "smoothness," it will be seen, is pretty exactly that which, by a strange enough instance of the force of a once thoroughly inculcated convention, persons who honestly think the poets from Coleridge to Tennyson much greater poets than those from Waller to Crabbe, still put in school-books as the standard of the "regular" heroic couplet. That is to say, two lines of ten syllables each, with "accents on the even places," a division in sound if not in sense somewhere about the middle, and an exact but not identical rhyme at the end, are kept as far as possible complete in themselves, without necessarily borrowing from or intruding into those which precede or those which follow. This severance of the couplets Waller does not yet *thoroughly* observe; but he observes all the other rules. He has no trisyllabic feet; he has no "wrenched accents," as they call it. The motion of his metre is as regular as that of a rocking-horse in good order and on a good floor. He allows himself expletives—especially the conjugations of "do"—in a way which will soon be tabooed; but this is done to attain "smoothness." Further, he has, by congeniality of nature, already attained certain characteristics which, though not "in the bond," as a matter of fact always

Characteristics  
of his  
"smoothness."

<sup>1</sup> With the sweet sound of this harmonious lay  
About the keel delighted dolphins play;  
Too sure a sign of sea's ensuing rage  
Which must anon this royal troop engage:  
To whom soft sleep seems more secure and sweet  
Within the town commanded by our fleet.

develop themselves in this sort of couplet, and are recognised as a sort of *patina* or added grace in it. Keeping the pause as close to the middle as possible naturally causes a slight opposition, or antithesis, of motion in the two halves, and this as naturally invites a slight antithesis of sense. Corresponding epithets in the two halves help this antithesis very much, and they duly make their appearance; while the same want which suggests the expletive verb also suggests the expletive epithet. Lastly, not to make too great a breach, too great a rupture of smoothness, between the lines, the rhymes are chosen with as little echo and depth in them as possible: and even the words within the lines themselves avoid thunderous and long-drawn sound.

But whatever be this form's merit or its shortcomings, there is practically no question but that Waller had a great and a curiously *prospective* command of it. That the command was great, the example already quoted, and almost any other in his work, should sufficiently show. That it was mainly a matter of instinct rather than of trained obedience to rule, a perusal of his whole work will show quite as decidedly. For instance, in one of his very latest poems, the Epitaph on Henry Dunch, written when Waller was eighty years old and about to follow his friend next year, he not merely writes—

Which, well observing, he returned with more  
Value for England than he had before—

an overrunning of the line which is quite Chamberlaynian—but overruns the couplet itself in

A pious son, a husband, and a friend.  
To neighbours too his bounty did extend  
So far, etc.

On the whole, however, it is evident that his genius prompted him continually in the direction of the smooth, stopped, antithetic couplet. He was, of course, not its Columbus; nobody was. It was only an island lying off the inhabited continent, which had been visited now and then, but never regularly colonised till, about

his time, the chief seat of prosodic civilisation and government was transferred to it. But that Waller had as much to do as anybody with the transference nobody had, or is ever likely to have, better opportunities for knowing, or better brains for judging, than Dryden; and what Dryden's opinion was we know.<sup>1</sup>

His prosodic interest, however, is very far from being confined to the couplet, though, curiously enough, the remainder of it has a bearing also on this. It may be at first sight surprising, but only to those who have not considered the matter, to find that, out of this peculiar couplet, Waller is by no means infallibly or continuously "smooth." The one thing of his that everybody knows, or used to know, "Go, lovely rose," has, of course, nothing that can be called harshness about it. But it is not particularly mellifluous; and among the abundant honey-pots of Caroline lyric it is perhaps rather dry than sweet. The alternate eights of "Chloe, yourself you so excel" are better, but not extraordinary; and I turn his lyrics over backwards and forwards, without being able to find anything that has the intense, the almost overpowering exquisiteness of music which belongs, not merely to Herrick and Carew and Crashaw and Marvell, but to Kynaston and Stanley, and even John Hall. The best things are the catalectic trochaic dimeters of the Amoret poem, with the contrasted quatrains<sup>2</sup> on Amoret herself and her rival—in fact, these last eight lines are the best things that Waller ever did. But the curious thing is that he

<sup>1</sup> The finest couplet that Waller wrote, and his most poetical passage, composed, as it happened, just before his own death—

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,  
Lets in new light through chinks which Time hath made,

is a good example of the yeoman's service that prosody can do to poetry. As a *couplet* it is not out of the way, though the variation of *cæsure* and the monosyllabic constitution of the last line are noteworthy; but the effect of the thought, which *here* is the chief beauty, is much enhanced by the curiously varied values of *a* in the first line and *i* in the second.

<sup>2</sup> Amoret ! as sweet and good  
As the most delicious food,  
Which, but tasted, does impart  
Life and gladness to the heart.

not only never reaches the most poignant harmony, but is sometimes capable of singular discord. Even Johnson perceived the strange cacophony of the *Puerperium*,<sup>1</sup> which prompts a charitable reader to ask whether there is not some mistake, whether he has not got hold of a foul copy. I suppose it was written to music—that fertile source of prosodic imperfection. But then a poet with a good ear would have refused to write to this music—would have said, “You must please make your music musical *for verse*.”

There is yet another place where this excuse, though bad, will have to be replaced by a worse, and that is the piece cited below.<sup>2</sup> It may be observed that it is called a “Song,” so, once more, the reason of the cacophony may be musical; but it is, at least, prosodically explicable (which the other is not) on the ground of a prosodic mistake. We know—and Waller doubtless knew—how charmingly the heptasyllable, not merely of preserved iambic cadence, but of cadence definitely shifted to trochaic, adapts itself to the regular iambic octosyllable. It is very improbable that he did not know *Comus* and Milton’s other minor poems, which appeared in print before his own. He certainly knew Shakespeare’s triumphs in the measure, and he could not be ignorant of the more than successful attempts of Jonson, Browne, Wither, and others. But he seems not to have noticed—or noticing, to have neglected—the remarkable fact that in all these cases the rhyme is continuous and completed.

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Saccharissa’s beauty’s wine  
Which to madness doth incline :  
Such a liquor as no brain  
That is mortal can sustain.

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*—

Fair Venus in thy soft arms  
The god of Rage confine ;  
For thy whispers are the charms  
Which only can divert his fierce design.

<sup>2</sup> Say, lovely dream ! where could’st thou find  
Shades to counterfeit that face ;  
Colours of this glorious kind  
Come not from any mortal place.



He endeavoured—and the endeavour was quite justified as an experiment—to twist the arrangement and make the rhymes alternate. But his very first stanza ought to have shown him that this was, in the excellent Biblical word we have used before, “confusion.” Exactly why the ear revolts at this combination of shifted metre without apparent rhyme it might be difficult to say; though on some of the symbolist systems I daresay it could be accounted for in the manner which does not account. But the fact can be illustrated by another little experiment, curious but conclusive. Shift the rhyme-words to make couplet arrangement, and, though the sense will be damaged, you will find that the rhythm is, as if by miracle, restored—

Say, lovely dream! where could'st thou find  
Shades to counterfeit that kind;  
Colours of this glorious face  
Come not from any mortal place.

I have made many curious observations in the course of this work, but I do not know one which pleases me more than this.

The fact is (and it may be set as people please on either side of the account) that special aptitude and predilection for the stopped couplet seems, save perhaps in the solitary case of Dryden, to preclude aptitude for any other measure. It may be that this couplet is Aphrodite Urania, and that he who loves her can tolerate no meaner love. It may go more nearly to be thought by some that an opposite explanation is correct. Or, without being thus personal, it may be said, and perhaps most philosophically as well as most politely, that the measure is so extremely specialised that tongue and ear and finger, once thoroughly subdued to it, can adapt themselves to no other. But the fact, with the rule-proving exception of the gigantic if not god-like craftsmanship of Dryden, is the fact. In Waller's case I think his prosodic shortcomings account, at least as much as any quality of his thought, for the unsatisfactory character of his lyric.

Their moral as  
to the couplet

Compare "Chloris! farewell" with Marvell's masterpiece<sup>1</sup> in the same stanza. The thought of the latter is better, no doubt; but its betterment is for less in the matter than the limpness of Waller's measure contrasted with the undeniable spring and soar of Marvell's,<sup>2</sup> or than the tameness of Waller's diction contrasted with the rocket-scattering quality of "rare" in the place where it occurs and the magnificent bulk and run of the single word "impossibility." The couplets on Myra, "The Night Piece,"<sup>3</sup> are very pretty and graceful, and not much less "metaphysical" than the wildest excesses of Benlowes or Crashaw. But, once more, both measure and diction are flaccid; there is no throb, no quiver, no explosive and jaculative quality about them. In fact, one feels inclined to play on them the reverse trick to that which we are going to play on Garth and Pope and expand them in decasyllables—

[Fell] darkness which [the] fairest nymphs disarms  
Defends us ill from [radiant] Myra's charms,

etc. But this is too wicked.

Cowley—his  
curious posi-  
tion

Cowley is a far more of a prosodic puzzle than his fellows, Waller and Denham, and the much greater bulk of his work might seem to challenge more elaborate treatment than was demanded even by Waller. The puzzle indeed is, as is *not* the case with them, one in which the general poetical question is rather inextricably mixed up with the special or prosodic. Waller had little, and Denham had less, of the pure poet about him; but Cowley had a great deal. Even Johnson admitted that; and yet Johnson might have been supposed to be prejudiced against Cowley three or four times over, not merely by his metaphysicality, but by the further facts that large parts of his works are regularly lyrical in form,

<sup>1</sup> *V. inf.*, p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> Observe that Marvell himself is *not* an exception to the rule above. His lyrics are splendid, but his couplets, though vigorous, are not accomplished.

<sup>3</sup> The poem is late, but still too early for Granville's "Myra," Lady Newburgh, the object of so much admiration in her youth and of Dr. King's Yahoo-like satire in her age.

a form for which Johnson cared little ; that he was the inventor and most considerable practitioner of Pindarics, the irregularity of which the great lexicographer hated more than anything else ; and that his principal couplet-poem, the  *Davideis* , is sacred in subject and not invariably or excessively smooth in form. The fact is that it is very difficult for anybody who really likes poetry in *any* form not to like something in Cowley ; but for this very reason (or the counterpart and complement of it) it is still more difficult for any one who has decided tastes in poetry to like Cowley everywhere or very much. It may be even not mere paradox to suggest that in this peculiarity lies the secret, at once of his astonishing popularity for a time and of his rapid and complete loss of that popularity. He represented all the tastes of a time of transition and overlapping ; and he could please all while none was particularly dominant. He wrote couplets better than any "metaphysical" and lyrics much better than any of the new couplet poets ; while he provided in his Pindarics an escape for those who found the couplet too monotonous and the lyrics too fantastic. He did serve many masters—with success as long as one master had not definitely got the mastery. But when this happened he went down ; and when, long afterwards, the strong man had to give way to a stronger, he did not come up again.

This not exactly Laodicean but in some respects "trimming" temperament is as noticeable in him—has indeed, by allusion and glance, been already shown to be as noticeable—in true prosodic respects as in regard of subject and of other matters. Cowley's couplet, which, let it be remembered, is not, like some others, open to any chronological scepticism, is an interesting study. In his *Juvenile Poems*, published when he was fifteen, in 1633, the year before *Comus*, they only appear in the closing distichs of the sixains of *Constantia and Philetus*, etc. But *Sylva* (three years later, and a year before *Lycidas*) is full of them. They exhibit a much less definitely stopped form than those of Waller's probably, and Beaumont's certainly, ten years' older attempts ; and are some-

His couplet  
generally.

times frankly enjambed. In them sometimes, and in other pieces often, the boy-poet (he was still only eighteen) succumbs to the worst fault of the time—a fault which the pure stopped couplet (to do it justice) *did* discourage—the fault of apostrophation without the possibility of elision or of a harmonious trisyllabic foot, as thus—

By calling th' Pope the Whore of Babylon,

where you certainly can apply a remedy worse than the disease by reading "the Pope" and "th'ore." But this is not in a couplet.

Nor can it be said that Cowley ever gave himself up entirely, or mainly, to Wallerian "smoothness." He could and did attain it towards the end of his life: but it is evident that he never fell into the groove in which it is practically impossible for a man *not* to give it. And the verse of his *Davideis* deserves a brief study.

The *Davideis*.

The *Davideis* is one of those poems in dealing with which it is rather common for critics to lament the rarity with which it is read, and then to insinuate reasons why people should think twice or thrice before reading it. I have read it myself more than once, and I can see no reason why anybody, who does not read "for the subject" only, should not follow my example. From that point of view it has the inevitable drawback of sacred narrative verse, that the main story is known, and that the teller's ekings of it can hardly interest, and may possibly displease. But this does not concern us. What does concern us is to determine whether Cowley was justified in the rather rash and not very modest boast, made in good lines towards the beginning—

Lo! this great work, a temple to thy praise,  
On polished pillars of strong verse I raise.

Certainly not over-modest, and as certainly rather rash. But, as it happens, the couplet which comes immediately before this—

From earth's vain joys, and Love's soft witchcraft free,  
I consecrate my Magdalene to thee,

is something of a justification. Indeed, there is a note in it far above the mere tick-tick of Waller, and anticipating to no small extent the resounding line of Dryden himself, who, beyond all doubt, paid in his youth much attention to Cowley. Nor is the whole paragraph which introduces these lines much less worthy of study.

And the qualities here found are frequent throughout the poem. "Strong lines" (to use his own words, both in and out of connection with Walton's well-known observation) abound; strong couplets hardly less; strong passages of no inconsiderable bulk could be produced in plenty to match or excel that given just now. But it is clear that Cowley, like Dryden again, wanted, to show his prosodic powers, more room than the narrow lists of the Fairfaxian-Wallerian couplets could give him. He soon expatiates into the Alexandrine. An early instance is—

And overruns the neighbouring fields with violent course.

There is no doubt that, whatever the tyranny of regularity may order, this expatiation does give to the couplet a liberty, and at the same time a majesty, which are unobtainable without it. And Johnson, had another man said it, would have been the first to find this demurrer to his own argument, "I cannot discover why the pine<sup>1</sup> is taller in an Alexandrine than in ten syllables." Indeed, he hastens to supply the demurrer himself by saying of the other line—

Which runs, and, as it seems, for ever shall run on,

that it is "an example of representative versification which perhaps no other English line can equal." If you may do "representative versification" in water, why may you not do it in wood?

On the other hand, Johnson is certainly right in part, and no small part, when he says that Cowley's versifica-

<sup>1</sup> In this very line—

Like some fair pine o'erlooking all the ignoble wood—

it is astonishing that Johnson should have overlooked the overlooking of ten syllables by twelve.

tion is sometimes harsh to modern ears. The line which Cowley himself thought might require justification to the most part of readers<sup>1</sup>—

Nor can the glory contain itself in th' endless space,  
requires it still, and will find it very difficult to get.  
That there was something wrong with his own ears, or his own principles, is evident from the fact that he thinks this plea of "representative versification" will cover it, and alleges among his parallels the very line we gave above, "And overruns," etc., which is perfectly unobjectionable, and another—

Down a precipice, deep down, he casts them all,  
which is, if anything, rather worse than "Nor can the glory."

His own  
principles.

This doctrine of sound to suit sense never lost its hold, even when Cowley himself was slighted, and it will meet us often. It is obviously of very limited validity—at best a beggarly element of the great doctrine of verbal and specially vowel music; while, applied as Cowley applies it, it ignores a far higher law, the necessity under which metre lies of conforming to its own nature.

In fact, no theory of foot or accent will save the bad lines quoted. In particular, on our principles at least—

Down a precipice, deep down, he casts them all,  
commits the very worst fault that verse can commit, that of suggesting a different rhythm and line-base from that which was intended. Had I seen this verse without its context, I should have supposed it to be one of the rough but fairly marked anapæstic lines which were then just coming in—

Down a pre cipice, deep | down, he casts | them all.

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<sup>1</sup> His words are: "I am sorry that it is necessary to admonish the most part of readers, that it is not by negligence that this verse is so loose, long, and, as it were, vast: it is to paint in the number, the nature of the thing which it describes . . . The thing is that the disposition of words and numbers should be such as that, out of the order and sound of them, the things themselves may be represented."

These things occur far too often in the *Davidéis*; but they occur side by side with others, which, in a sort of incult luxuriance, have very considerable beauty. Nor is it quite obvious why Johnson so greatly preferred the lines on Crashaw's death, which, fine as they are,<sup>1</sup> are not finer than many of the *Davidéis* passages, and exhibit very much the same liberties from the Johnsonian point of view of versification. The Alexandrine, at any rate, is in constant evidence here.

It is characteristic of that contradictory quality which His lyrics. we have noted in Cowley that he is not merely inclined to eccentricity in the couplet and to regularity in lyric—we noticed this, too, in his far greater master, Donne—but that he is on the whole more timid in his diction exactly when he has the instrument that generally tempts to audacity. He is certainly very much more of a singer than Waller; but he is seldom "nobly wild." His most popular and perhaps his best thing—the well-known "Chronicle" of what we do not need biographers to tell us were almost to a certainty imaginary loves—is of absolute prosodic adequacy: it runs with a light, bright, regular insincerity which leaves nothing to desire in its own particular fashion. Nor does he ever, as we have shown that Waller does, choose positively unsuccessful—perhaps positively illegitimate—measures. But some of his also are not very happy. Here is one which he uses more than once—

Why, O, doth sandy Tagus ravish thee,  
Though Neptune's treasure house it be?  
Why doth Pactolus thee bewitch,  
Infected yet with Midas' glorious itch?

Ode II.

where the two shorter and central lines should certainly rhyme, or else the line-lengths should be differently adjusted. Two other forms (*v. inf.* Odes IV. and V.) are

<sup>1</sup> The whole piece, being short, *is* perhaps the best place to study the Cowleian couplet for those who blench from the *Davidéis*, and it starts with—

Poet and saint! to thee alone are given  
The two most sacred names of Earth and Heaven.

much better; but they are still rather, to use the old fable, clay birds prettily moulded than the same made alive. His very favourite octave of couplets in varying line-length is sometimes better. But both in these and in others he too often reminds us of that frightful vision of Guest's (more terrible far than the much-talked-of Lucretian nightmare of the homeless atoms sleeting in the void) of a poet sitting down to try all possible "sections"—and *not* rejecting those which are unsuccessful. Another curious pair of metres illustrating the way in which he will keep both a bad creation and a good one will be found below.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps as successful as any are his schemes for the elegy on William Hervey, and the version of Horace's *Pyrrha*, which contains some very pleasant things—not so plain in their neatness as Milton's, but daintily decked enough. He has not lost the gift of the earlier century in trochaics; his Anacreontics include many well-known, and deservedly well-known, pieces; and the infinite variety of metre in the *Mistress* cannot, in such hands, fail sometimes to be charming. Perhaps the finest measure of all, the opening of "The Change,"<sup>2</sup> is merely a modification, in the last line, of the old sixain. But

<sup>1</sup> Here's to thee, Dick; this whining love despise.  
Pledge me, my friend; and drink till thou be'st wise.  
It sparkles brighter far than she,  
'Tis pure and bright without deceit;  
And such no woman e'er will be.  
No: they are all sophisticate.

When chance or cruel business parts us two,  
What do our souls, I wonder, do?  
Whilst sleep does our dull bodies tie,  
Methinks at home they should not stay,  
Content with dreams, but boldly fly  
Abroad and meet each other half the way.

<sup>2</sup> Love in her sunny eyes does basking play;  
Love walks the pleasant mazes of her hair;  
Love does on both her lips for ever stray,  
And sows and reaps a thousand kisses there:  
In all her outward parts Love's always seen;  
But oh! he never went within.

The second and fourth stanzas contract lines 2 and 4, and expand 6.



that of "Platonic Love" is very effective,<sup>1</sup> and the irregularly observed form of "Called Inconstant" might be still more so, if Cowley's phrasing, never a thing much to be depended on, had not failed him. He returns here frequently to his beloved ugliness of enclosed short lines that do not rhyme together. On the whole, he is rather unsuccessful in making his new schemes "run"; and it is no small relief to come—as in the famous piece which yields the hackneyed but still admirable

The adorning thee with so much art—

upon old ones.

But one must not be too hard on a courageous experimenter; and the greatest of Cowley's experiments, his "Pindaric," has yet to be noticed elsewhere. Still, on the whole, one should, prosodically as otherwise, correct a little that sentence of Rochester's which so shocked Dryden's propriety. It is not true that Cowley was "not of God"; but he was not quite sufficiently of God. There was too much wood, hay, and stubble mixed with his nobler materials; and in some cases even the fire of time will not burn these out and let the nobler things remain in literature.

Sir John Denham does not require much notice. Denham. There is no need to quarrel with the praise which Dryden bestowed upon the famous passage<sup>2</sup> known to everybody, and about the only thing that anybody, except a very few persons, does know of its author's. Nor is it really of much moment that this passage was not in the original edition of *Cooper's Hill*. The maxim of "Saint Archiclin" (as the early mediævals beatified "the ruler of

<sup>1</sup> Indeed I must confess,  
When souls mix, 'tis an happiness;  
But not complete till bodies too combine,  
And closely as our minds together join:  
But half of Heaven the souls in glory taste  
Till by love, in Heaven at last,  
Their bodies too are placed.

The last three lines rhyme in seventeenth-century English, and the triplet is essential.

<sup>2</sup> O could I flow, etc.

the feast") is not binding upon the poet. He may produce his wine in what order of merit pleases him; though if it pleases him not to produce "that which is worse" at all, so much the better. But what is worth our notice is, that, prosodically, this passage matches rather ill with the context in which it was set. Still, the whole is of very fair couplet standard, as are Denham's poems generally. He is a little happier than Waller in his lyric metres, chiefly for the reason that he seldom or never attempts impassioned verse, and that the step from the more or less flippant couplet to the wholly flippant "verse of society" is no wide one. Very good in its way is the last stanza of "Mr. Killigrew's Return"<sup>1</sup> and the first of the version of Martial's most graceless epigram.<sup>2</sup> The octosyllabic triplets of "Friendship" and "Single Life," and the couplets of the Cowley epitaph, are also very good; especially the latter, which are very sound criticism in excellent verse.<sup>3</sup> But they are nothing out of the way prosodically; nor is anything else of Denham's. He can make a good "copy of verses"—a much better copy of verses than most can make: but that is about all. He has as much of Dryden on one side, and of Prior on the other, as consists with being in a very different class of poetry and prosody from that which Dryden and Prior illustrate.

Thus, considering their prosodies not merely as regards the couplet, but generally, we see that neither Denham nor Cowley (he, indeed, least of all), nor even Waller, was

<sup>1</sup> Mirth makes them not mad  
Nor sobriety sad.  
But of that they are seldom in danger:  
At Paris, at Rome,  
At the Hague, they're at home—  
The good fellow is nowhere a stranger.

<sup>2</sup> Prythee die and set me free,  
Or else be  
Kind and brisk, and gay like me:  
I pretend not to the wise ones,  
To the grave (*bis*)  
Or the precise ones.

<sup>3</sup> Our Chaucer, like the morning star,  
To us discovers day from far, etc.

whole-hearted in practising and championing the form, and that peculiarities discoverable in their other verse affected, to some extent, their practice here.

Such, however, are the general prosodic aspects of the three chief introducers of the new form of verse in the mid-seventeenth century. But, meanwhile, the precise form and order of the stopped couplet itself were being determined, as such things often are, at least as much by Eris as by Philia—by the competition and contrast of a form and order entirely different. We have seen, repeatedly, that the couplet itself, in its earlier history, never can make up its mind which fork of the Y to take, and is nearly as often enjambed as self-enclosed. Yet the recoil from fifteenth and early sixteenth century disorder was itself in favour of the enclosed variety; and on the whole the tendency of it during the last quarter of the sixteenth was in this direction—the direction which was to be finally adopted. But as soon as the memory of that disorder became a little dimmed, and as soon as English poets generally began to be more sure of themselves, and not to require such obvious assistance as that of the line-stop, the other kind also began to be largely affected. We have seen it in reviewing prosodically the works of poets who did not wholly give themselves up to it, like Drayton and Daniel; we have seen it in poets who, like Browne and his set, positively preferred it in narrative and purely poetical poetry; while we have also seen it used, with pretty definite purpose, in satire. But as the century advanced, it acquired almost complete ascendancy in some cases; and though in some, again, of these its peculiar charm was conveyed, the *toxic* quality which that charm almost implied showed itself also, and beyond all doubt caused the double reaction—to blank verse in Milton's case, to the stopped couplet in others. To some of these instances we may now pay attention. The chief of them are, beyond all doubt, John Chalkhill or whosoever was the author of *Thealma and Clearchus*, Shakerley Marmion in *Cupid and Psyche*, and William Chamberlayne in *Pharonnida*.

The opposite  
or enjambed  
form.

Chalkhill,  
Marmion, and  
Chamberlayne.

If we accept the only evidence<sup>1</sup> which gives *Thealma* to Chalkhill, his precedence follows almost as a matter of course, for the same testimony implicitly asserts it. A person who was a "friend and acquaintant of Edmund Spenser" (*ob.* 1599), and who was probably coroner for Middlesex before 1603, could not well have written this much later than 1610 at the farthest, and ought to have written it much earlier, for it is evidently the work of a young man, saturated with the *Arcadia*. Its versification, however, is quite different from anything that we have so early; it is a much greater step in the direction of enjambment than anything in Browne or in Wither. Chalkhill's verse sentences are very nearly as stopless as Clarendon's prose ones, and very much less capable of being stopped by a little charitable and judicious assistance. At my first dip I light upon a passage of eighteen lines (*ed. cit.* p. 417) without a full stop either at line-end or in line-middle. But this prolixity is of much less importance to the point than the way in which Chalkhill treats the actual *ending of the line*. It is in this that the real difference of the two systems lies. It is possible to run the two lines of the couplet pretty frequently into each other, and even not to refrain scrupulously from overrunning the second, without seriously infringing the principle of "stop." This principle is that, unless there is something special to be gained prosodically, grammatically, or otherwise, there shall be a pretty well-marked pause at the line-end, and a very well-marked pause indeed at the couplet-end. This may be said to have been observed by everybody who used "riding rhyme" from Chaucer to Drayton; and, though Browne and others violate it without scruple and without attending to the proviso, they do not seem utterly reckless of it. Chalkhill constantly, Marmion rather less often, and Chamberlayne as a rule, pay absolutely *no* attention to it—do not even seem to know that it exists.

<sup>1</sup> Izaak Walton's in the original edition. See the reprint of Singer, or that of the present writer in the second volume of *Minor Caroline Poets* (Oxford, 1906). *Cupid and Psyche* will be found in the same volume; *Pharonnida* in the first.

Very often they seem to think no more of "the end of the line" than if they were writing prose, except that it is the place where you have to provide a rhyme. If they do not make a point of overrunning it, it is simply because they do not apparently think about it at all. Nothing stops them; nominative can be separated from verb, adjective from substantive, preposition even from case, without compunction, and, in fact, without so much as attention or object. The result of this is that rhyme assumes quite a new character. It is no longer a "time-beater" or "flapper" except in a quite *minim* degree: it does not tell you (at least in any definite way) that you have come to the end of the line at all.

The constitutive difference of the two styles.

This may seem likely to be, and indeed sometimes is, a source of rhythmical danger; but these poets, to do them justice, generally have the sense of rhythm pretty well implanted in them, and can manage without the staff which they so ostentatiously refuse to employ for its staff-purpose. When this sense fails them, the effect is certainly not over-charming. On the other hand, rhyme, which is not of its nature a retiring or bashful thing, forges for itself a quite new office. It supplies a sort of *obbligato* accompaniment to the rhythm. In fact, this couplet at its best is rhymed blank verse, possessing the freedom, the variety, the absence of tick and click which distinguishes "blanks," and yet adding a sort of low guitarish accompaniment of rhyme-music. The poet gains immensely in range and room and verge; he need lose nothing in euphony. But it would be exceedingly uncandid to conceal, and indeed quite hopeless to attempt to conceal, that he often does lose a good deal.

The directions of his loss are various, and, though some of them lead out of strict prosody, they all concern us, because the general case is nothing if not prosodic. To begin with results concerning us technically least but most important from some points of view, the looseness of versification seems to pass, by some really metaphysical fate, into looseness of grammatical structure first, and then into looseness of story. This is least noticeable in

Dangers of enjambment.

Marmion, who has a classical pattern to keep him straight, and who also is by no means exclusively given to enjambment; it is much more noticeable in Chalkhill, who is very rarely stopped; and it reaches its extreme in Chamberlayne, who, though he can manage the stopped couplet well enough, and actually uses it when he thinks proper, evidently rejoices and almost wallows in the other. A collection of instances to be given at the end of the chapter may illustrate this, and the subject generally, much better than mere talking about it can do.

There is, however, another danger, of a somewhat different character, which touches us more nearly in its direct and downright consequence as well as in its process. Composition and versification of this kind tend to destroy or impair the very thing which should be the chief justification of such poetry—the separate line and phrase, the “jewel five words long,” which to some folk is the rose of poetry itself. There is this danger even in regard to the phrase, though Chamberlayne, at least, constantly manages to save that, and is prodigal of it beyond almost all but the greatest poets. But even he is careless of giving it to us in the line, or in definite multiples or fractions of the line. He slops it, and spills it about, so that, were it not for the more definite rhythm, it might be a clause of the ornater prose. Now, this cannot be right. “*Maxima debetur lineae reverentia.*”<sup>1</sup> It is the integer of poetry, the mistress of the poetic household, obliging indeed, and serviceable, ready to lend itself to any honest compliances, but not to be sunk and confounded in a mere mob of syllables.

In these two trios—Waller, Cowley, Denham; Chalkhill, Marmion, Chamberlayne—the Battle of the Couplets can be seen in the most instructive and illustrative manner possible. You may take them as group against group, as individual against individual, and not seldom as the individual divided against himself. For this latter purpose nothing is more luminous than the contrast of Chamber-

<sup>1</sup> It may be well to observe that I do *not* think the first syllable of *linea* short, and do *not* warrant its use for this sense in classical Latin.

layne's *Pharonnida* with his verses to Charles the Second—a contrast which, until recently, it was not easy to make, for Singer's reprint of *Pharonnida* did not include the lesser poem. That the couplet, no matter in what form, had by this time pretty well established itself as the vehicle of such addresses, is undoubted; but the way in which the very captain of one side is apparently compelled to desert to the other in his management of it for this purpose, is a palmary instance, if ever there was one. A definite subject, limited space, the necessity (or at least the obvious desirableness) of making your appeal as pointed and your points as clear as possible, obviously get the better of all personal and poetical inclination. When you say "And now to business," you take up the stopped form as you put on a business coat, without skirts and trimmings and furbelows. The age at this moment was saying "Now to business," and it took up its office jacket almost as a matter of course. It would be extremely easy for the present writer to extra-illustrate this chapter from all sorts of sources, well and little known; but for the general purposes of this history almost enough should have been said.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I have not given many examples of the stopped couplet, because it is well known and has undergone very little change from Fairfax's *Tasso* to Thackeray's *Timbuctoo*.

In Africa, a quarter of the world,  
Men's skins are black, their locks are crisp and curled,

sums it all up. The enjambed variety is much less uniform and much less known, and some specimens of its seventeenth-century form may be useful:—

The rebels, as you heard, being driven hence,  
Despairing e'er to expiate their offence  
By a too late submission, fled to sea  
In such poor barks as they could get, where they  
Roamed up and down, which way the winds did please,  
Without a chart or compass: the rough seas  
Enraged with such a load of wickedness,  
Grew big with billows, great was their distress;  
Yet was their courage greater; desperate men  
Grow valianter with suffering: in their ken  
Was a small island, thitherward they steer  
Their weather-beaten barks, each plies his gear;  
Some row, some pump, some trim the ragged sails,  
All were employed and industry prevails.

*Theatima and Clearchus*, 2203-2216.

(Note the final stopped form.)

When you are landed, and a little past  
The Stygian ferry, you your eyes shall cast  
And spy some busy at their wheel, and these  
Are three old women, called the Destinies.

*Cupid and Psyche*, iii. 259-262.

But ere the weak Euriolus (for he  
This hapless stranger was) again could be  
By strength supported, base Amarus, who  
Could think no more than priceless thanks was due  
For all his dangerous pains, more beastly rude  
Than untamed Indians, basely did exclude  
That noble guest : which being with sorrow seen  
By Ammida, whose prayers and tears had been  
His helpless advocates, she gives in charge  
To her Ismander—till that time enlarge  
Her than restrained desires, he entertain  
Her desolate and wandering friend. Nor vain  
Were these commands, his entertainment being  
Such as observant love thought best agreeing  
To her desires.

*Pharonnida*, IV. iii. 243-256.

Here are fourteen lines—seven couplets—without so much as a comma at the end of any one of them. On the double-page opening from which they are taken at hazard, *eighteen* lines only out of *ninety-eight* are ended with a stop of any kind. On the other hand, the Restoration poem (*England's Jubilee*) runs, though it is still enjambed in a way, like this :—

Pardon, great Prince, for all our offering here,  
But weak discoveries of our wants appear ;  
and  
The giddy rout who in their first address  
Cried " Liberty ! " but meant licentiousness.



## NOTE ON THE TWO COUPLETS

I BELIEVE it may be not quite superfluous to draw the special attention of the reader to the fact (which I have not neglected in the text of either volume, but which cannot be too clearly understood) that neither form of the couplet is absolutely the elder. In the pre-Chaucerian examples the tendency is, if anything, to a kind of stop; and though Chaucer's own bias is rather towards enjambment, it is not enjambment of the Chamberlaynian type. Moreover, stopped couplets of almost the stock eighteenth-century kind may be found in Spenser and in Shakespeare. The form is always pulling both ways from the first: and there is no distinct tug over the line till the Restoration.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DECAY OF DRAMATIC BLANK VERSE

Beaumont and Fletcher—Their taste for redundancy—Their attitude to their licences—Massinger—Ford—Shirley—Randolph—Brome—Davenport—Nabbes—Glaphorne—The actual *débâcle*—Suckling—Davenant—The problem—And its answer—Further instances—Goff and Cokain—*Nero* and *The Martyred Soldier*—*Rebellion*—*Andromana*—Divers Caroline plays compared with *Lust's Dominion*.

Beaumont and  
Fletcher.

To begin a chapter with the above heading by dealing with Beaumont and Fletcher may seem a critical eccentricity, if not a critical outrage. And to begin the third chapter of our Sixth Book with two writers who were dead years before Chapman and Jonson, themselves treated in the second chapter of the Fifth, may seem chronologically unpardonable. But I do not think that very much argument is necessary to rebut any of these charges. The constant caution given here as to overlapping should dispose of the second; and as far as the first is concerned, "I am," as Mr. Titmarsh would say, prepared "to construe anybody any day" in Beaumont and Fletcher, or in admiration of them.

There is, in fact, no doubt that in any well-arranged bird's-eye view of literary history, with a special prosodic outlook, they must appear as the first noteworthy examples of that "unscrewing" of dramatic blank verse which led, before long, to the break-up of its whole structure as a dramatic medium, and from which it required no less force than Milton's to rescue it as a vehicle of narrative. We have seen that Shakespeare

himself, whose death almost exactly coincided with Beaumont's, and who *may* have worked with the pair at *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, had in his own later plays eased the screws very freely, and rather hazardously in appearance. But, then, Shakespeare was such an absolute *tregetour* with blank verse, that he could make the rocks of its Brittany vanish as easily as he could bestow a sea-coast on its Bohemia. And if we could be quite sure, as we nearly may be, that *The Tempest* is his absolutely last play, and so later than *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, there would be good reasons for thinking that he had seen some danger in his penultimate practice, and, while not in the least giving up the advantages of redundancy, had determined to guard against its disadvantages.

For the "twins," on the other hand, it is clear either that the practice had no terrors, or that they determined to brave them. The prominence of redundancy, whether in the plays ascribed to Fletcher alone, to those ascribed to the pair, or in those ascribed to Fletcher and some collaborator other than Beaumont,<sup>1</sup> is so much of an accepted fact, that it is unnecessary to waste upon proving it space which we here want for things not generally accepted.<sup>2</sup>

Enough, perhaps, has been said in the chapter on Shakespeare on the almost inevitable danger of this practice. But what is extremely noticeable is that Beaumont and Fletcher, luxuriating thus in one of the great blank-verse licences, appear either not to feel the

Their taste for  
redundance.

Their attitude  
to their  
licences.

<sup>1</sup> I was rebuked twenty years ago for declining to enter into this question of distribution in my *History of Elizabethan Literature*. I am afraid that frequent reading and study, including the task of editing the text of one play, *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, in the most minute and careful fashion possible, has left me impenitent and of the same opinion still—that distribution is impossible.

<sup>2</sup> Here are a few arithmetical facts. In Philaster's last speech before the revolution at the end of the play named after him, there are twelve redundancies in twenty-eight lines; in Cæsar's magnificent lament for *The False One* (perhaps the greatest thing in the whole vast work), striking out the two awkward interruptions of Antony and Dolabella, there are twenty-nine lines, of which all but ten are redundant; in Aspasia's picture-piece at the end of the Second Act of *The Maid's Tragedy* there are eighteen lines and eight redundancies. But one need not take sledge-hammers to doors that are open.

need of the other, or purposely to abstain from it. They have trisyllabic feet, of course, but in comparison with Shakespeare's these are few. Nor are they very fond of Alexandrines, though these also do occur. On the other hand—and it is the great merit of their verse—they have learnt from Shakespeare, or found out for themselves, almost the full virtue of the varied pause and run-on sense, though they are less careful than he is to vary the variation. This varied pause and run-on sense, in fact, is almost necessary in order to carry off frequent redundance: for a succession of single-moulded lines with redundant endings is one of the most monotonous and one of the ugliest things possible in blank-verse making.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the exquisiteness of their lyrics shows the very high prosodic degree which they, or one of them, probably Fletcher, had attained. In hands less drilled to harmony, the redundance could not but have been offensive; and in such hands it was bound to become so. But this sleight of ear, and wise abstinence from "licence on licence," kept them, if not scatheless, yet comparatively unscathed. It made them, however, none the better models, for the old *vitiis imitabile* is nowhere a truer maxim than in prosody.

Massinger. The blank verse of Massinger, inferior as he is in poetry to the twins, has in a certain sense more interest than theirs, because it exhibits conflicting tendencies.

<sup>1</sup> Take an instance even from their own work in the speech of Archas (*The Loyal Subject*, IV. v.). Here are very numerous redundances (only four or five lines out of twenty-nine being without them), few or no important internal pauses, and a general single-moulded line—

If I had swelled the soldier, or intended  
An act in person leaning to dishonour,  
As you would fain have forced me, witness Heaven,  
Where clearest understanding of all truth is  
(For men are spiteful men, and know no pi[e]ty).  
When Olin came, grim Olin, when his marches, etc., etc., etc.

It is not easy to imagine a worse effect, and I am bound to say that the peculiar "Fletcherian" amphibrach or antibacchic conclusion (of which Milton's "in this soil," and similar things (*v. sup.*), are supposed to be followings), does not arride me much, especially when preceded, as it is often or very closely, by a pause. It has, as I said above, a "stumbling"—as I might almost say a hiccupping—effect, which I cannot think agreeable or artistic.

We know that he worked with Fletcher; and if we did not know it, the approximation of some of his verse to that of the more usual pair would be obvious to any careful reader. Indeed, I believe the "enumerators" rank him next to Fletcher, though a good deal below him, in point of "weak endings," which are evident enough in most of his best and worst passages. Nay more, he sometimes experiences the drawbacks of the practice more than Beaumont and Fletcher do; for he is less careful to vary and lengthen the internal pauses, and not unfrequently has a full stop at the redundant syllable, a thing only tolerable in very special cases. On the other hand, his proportion of redundant lines is certainly smaller; and he seems to have realised the truth that they are seasonings, or at most side-dishes, not *pièces de résistance*. The consequence is that two closely connected but not quite indistinguishable types of blank verse emerge in him—the one nearer to Fletcher and "dissolution," the other to Shakespeare and the perfect middle way. Indeed, here for the first time we can speak of resemblance to the greater and earlier writers with some special propriety. More than one student of the Elizabethan drama, since it was possible to study it as a whole or nearly so, has noticed in Massinger, and in him first, distinct "literary" quality—the evidence of writing in a school.<sup>1</sup> And this is, I think, as clear in the passages where he tempers redundance with arrest, and thus is at his highest, as in those where he lets the Fletcherian volubility carry him away.

Ford is so much less inclined to redundance that, Ford. reading him independently and in no conscious relation to others, it might seem, in him, no more than the exception which occurs, as we have seen, almost from the first. Indeed, his blank verse generally is of a much older type than that of any one mentioned in this chapter; and it sometimes, as in the remarkable piece of lurid bombast

<sup>1</sup> I do not refer to mere citations and references, such as those dealt with in Dr. E. Koepfel's interesting essays on *Ben Jonsons Wirkung*, etc. (Heidelberg, 1906).

(and yet not quite bombast neither) which may be cited below from *Love's Sacrifice*,<sup>1</sup> carries one right back to the University Wits. Nor in his greater plays does the staple of verse ever approach the dressing-gown-and-slippers form. It is impossible, in our very limited knowledge of Ford's history, to decide whether this is a case of a man writing late in life (as he seems pretty certainly to have done) and deliberately or unconsciously observing the fashions of his youth, or of one making (in this case deliberately beyond all doubt) a literary study of his forerunners and adopting a standard according to the older of them. Probably there is something of both; there is almost certainly something, whether much or little, of the second. For Ford, though very far indeed from being the least, is certainly the most artificial of all the giant race before the flood; he smells most of the lamp; he betrays most clearly that *renchérissement* which we can only express in English by the doubly disreputable aid of paraphrase and slang. It is almost if not quite a necessary consequence of this, that his blank verse is the least flowing and varied of any. But it ought to be set to his credit that it is an almost perfect instrument for the class of subjects which he proposes to treat. The consummate and universal Shakespearian form would expose the "extra-naturality" of the *Broken Heart* and 'Tis pity she's a Whore too much; the loose Fletcherian would make their excesses disgusting.

In neither Massinger nor Ford, however, can there be said to be much abuse of the trisyllabic foot; while the very peculiarities which have been mentioned save Ford, and to a rather less degree Massinger, from the great danger of all, slipshod and clumsy enjambment. This cannot be said of the last scene or "Shakescene" of the Shirley. company, James Shirley. The literary tendency which

<sup>1</sup> iv. 1. *Duke.* Forbear; the ashy paleness of my cheek  
Is scarleted in ruddy flakes of wrath;  
And, like some bearded meteor, shall suck up  
With swiftest terror all those dusky mists  
That overcloud compassion in our breast.

Here, as of old, it does not matter in the very least that there is no stop either at "cheek" or "mists." The line *as such* is bullet-moulded.

has just been noticed is more noticeable in Shirley than ever: he not only collaborates with other men—that had always been done—but he finishes their work, writes new plays which are obvious refashionings of old, follows parts of old plays freely. He is, moreover, of his own time as well as of theirs, and though not by any means so great a sinner in the special sins of that time as some, he is not free from them, as the speech of Fernando in Act II. Sc. i. of *The Brothers*, one of his best and most serious attempts, will show.<sup>1</sup> Nobody, I suppose, will charge the present writer with looking too much awry on prosodic licences. But I do not see how it is possible to regard such things as the line-breaks at “what,” and still more the thrice-continued one at “to,” “thou,” and “shall,” as other than extremely ugly blemishes. It is true that Shirley rarely—as we shall see in a moment many of his fellows do—complicates this licence with others—redundance, trisyllabic feet of the clumsiest kind, and ill-rhythmed lines or lines of quite haphazard length, till verse disappears altogether in a slough of the most awkward prose. But in this overrunning of the line which must be taken in conjunction with the tendency to overrun the couplet (see last chapter), he is a most offending soul. One turns a leaf and finds—

He had better cool his hot blood in the frozen  
Sea, and rise hence a rock of adamant  
To draw more wonder to the north, than but  
Attempt to wrong her chastity.

---

<sup>1</sup> I dare,  
With conscience of my pure intent, try what  
Rudeness you find upon my lip, 'tis chaste  
As the desires that breathe upon my language.  
I began, Felisarda, to affect thee  
By seeing thee at prayers; thy virtue winged  
Love's arrows first, and 'twere a sacrilege  
To choose thee now for sin, that hast a power  
To make this place a temple by thy innocence.  
I know thy poverty, and came not to  
Bribe it against thy chastity; if thou  
Vouchsafe thy fair and honest love, it shall  
Adorn my fortunes which shall stoop to serve it  
In spite of friends or destiny.

(Ed. Dyce, i. 212.)

Here a fight might be made for "but" if it stood by itself; but the neighbourhood of "frozen" with its totally unjustifiable divorce from "sea" is not likely to dispose any one with an ear to mercy. And what on earth was there to prevent his writing—

He had better cool his hot blood in the sea  
Of ice, and rise a rock of adamant?

That is, in fact, the question; and it is a question which can only be answered, "The spirit of the age was there to prevent him, and he was not strong enough to withstand it." Not that Shirley is a bad blank-verse writer by any means; these very passages, which were chosen at the purest hazard to show his vices, show his virtues as well.<sup>1</sup> He really has at times, and not so seldom, form, fire, *timbre*. I am not certain that he has not sometimes more of these than either Ford or Massinger, though he has nothing like their dramatic power. But the epidemic of looseness is on him, though not in its worst form. With Minerva willing he can write the beautiful last lines of Amidea, which are so interesting to contrast with Otway's similar exaggerations of Fletcherian sentiment, and the still more beautiful lament of Florio over her, where, be it observed, redundance appears strongly to express passion in the old way. Nor does he require strong situations; although facile in these he can furnish ordinary blank verse as well as Middleton or Heywood (as per dip in *The Young Admiral*, p. 123), and sometimes extraordinary blank verse (as in *The Cardinal*, p. 343). His prowess in lyric is well known; and that he should sometimes slip in the manner above indicated is a great sign of the times.

To find, however, this sign in complete ascendant, we

<sup>1</sup> The very beautiful one (noticed long ago by Farmer, and in a note to Dyce's ed.), ending—

And with it many beams twisted themselves  
Upon whose golden threads the angels walk  
To and again from Heaven,

is not far from the others.



must pursue the line of evidence (as it was not necessary to do in the last chapter on the subject) through some of the minorities. Not all are guilty, yet even in the innocent we may observe that they are, as a rule, the older. Thomas Randolph,<sup>1</sup> as became a son of Ben and Randolph. a scholar, is quite free from the roughest impeachment. Randolph's verse may not be of the first quality as poetry ; his subjects do not give it much opportunity of being so. But it is strong, free, well-ordered, and able to avail itself of all lawful things without being brought into bondage to any. The speech of Mediocrity at the close of *The Muses' Looking-Glass* is an excellent piece of blank verse of a good pattern ; and neither here nor in the other plays shall we find anything that can truly be called bad. The frequentation of Ben indeed appears to have been to some extent sovereign against verse-paralysis. "Dick" Brome, Brome. whom he "had for a servant once" and whose promotion to the status of playwright he welcomed in nearly his best manner, was a person whose own manner obviously "better suited prose." The character of his happiest plays—and they are very far from unhappy—invites it, and he does well in it. But when he has occasion to give verse, which he does not infrequently, it is quite competent and in fact rather interesting, because it takes all the liberties—redundance, trisyllabic feet, etc. It is never, perhaps, very poetical, but also it never falls into mere chaos. The general blank-verse scheme is perfectly well maintained.

Another minor of the third decade of the century, Davenport. Robert Davenport, is also, at his best, fairly "tight and shipshape and Bristol fashion." Now this is the more remarkable because his plays are not well printed ; and Mr. Bullen in his reprint of them has taken no liberties, though he makes a few suggestions. There is plenty of very rough verse in him. I do not know that it can

<sup>1</sup> Of course his claims are not limited to blanks. He has good couplets ; capital "broken and cuttut verse" in the "Anthony Stafford" Ode and other pieces ; excellent octosyllabic triplets in his "Epithalamium." But it is all rather forged than fused.

be acquitted entirely of symptoms of a break-up. The trisyllabic feet are often mere slurs, mere patter; and there are numerous passages where one would very greatly prefer mere prose, and may indeed suspect that mere prose was meant. But these very shortcomings imply that he has over all an impression and atmosphere of the true blank verse—which impression and atmosphere are the very things that are wanting in some writers to whom we are coming.

Nabbes.

The same is very much the case with the still later, looser, and more pedestrian Nabbes. There is really not much more need for him to "drop into verse" than there is for Brome, but he does it, and does it by no means badly. He even sometimes, as in *The Unfortunate Mother*, resolves to be nothing if not poetical, and carries out his resolve without too much failure from the merely formal point of view. Only, once more, when he employs the two, one can often hardly help saying, "Why not write prose entirely?" and when he sticks to verse, "Was it necessary to take so much trouble?" For, once more, blank verse is, in the double sense, nearest prose; and it has to be in many ways careful lest it knock down the partition between the two houses.

Glaphorne.

That much-abused, and it may be admitted not very much-deserving, playwright Glaphorne occupies perhaps a somewhat middle position. As there is no reason why some of his plays should have been more carefully printed than others, one can only suppose that he himself was more careless in some of them. Take Sir Martin's speech in the first Scene of the fourth Act of *The Hollander*, and you will have to rewrite it in its earlier or latter parts to get any kind of pure blank-verse rhythm into them; yet the middle is of very fair quality. Contrast Wallenstein's speech and that of his son on opposite pages of the Pearson reprint (48, 49); take numerous speeches of Doria in *The Lady's Privilege*. They might seem to have been written by different persons: it is difficult to imagine that any one who had been sufficiently broken to the writing of blank verse to produce some of them, or parts of some,

could possibly be guilty of others or parts of others. Yet an example of this kind is a convenient and valuable bridge between those which we have just been examining and those which we are now to examine. That the school of Fletcher generally tended to laxity, and the school of Jonson to correctness, may be true enough. But there must have been something in the air which affected the former to produce something more than laxity. For Fletcher is seldom or never unrhythmical: men like Glapthorne, and, still more, men like the remarkable pair to which we are coming, with even Shirley to keep them company, are.

Of Suckling we may certainly say, as we said of Shirley, that his metrical prowess in lyric is well known; indeed, it is much better known. Some half-a-dozen pieces of Suckling's are familiar, to the fairly well-read general reader, for one of Shirley's. It is true there is the doggerel *Session*; but putting what is said elsewhere aside, the most accurate and punctilious metrist in the world may write doggerel deliberately. Take up Suckling's plays and you will meet on every page doggerel that is *not* meant—that has no conceivable reason for being meant—as doggerel. There is a specimen on the third page of *Aglaure*—not an extreme one by any means, but a fair average.

The actual  
*débaîcle*  
Suckling.

This opens, not with a casual Alexandrine which Shakespeare might very well do, but with rhymed Alexandrines—things uncommonly difficult to smuggle in, even with a special purpose, in blank verse. Then it at once settles down to rather shambling decasyllables of the ordinary kind. All of a sudden occurs a clumsy octosyllable—

Would come should make me master of,

paralleled lower down by another and clumsier—

It cannot be long, for sure fate must.

The example, it has been said, is not an extreme one, but it already makes one think of the Lydgatian chaos which we struggled through of old. Here is a worse—

*Thor.* Softly, as death itself comes on  
 When it doth steal away the sick man's breath,  
 And standers-by perceive it not,  
 Have I trod the way unto their lodgings.  
 How wisely do those powers  
 That give us happiness order it! etc. etc.

Now I do not say that by "arranging" you may not pull a verse here and a verse there straight after a fashion, but I do say that the whole is hopeless. And one could parallel it and outdo it, a hundred times over, from Suckling.

Davenant. But there is another case which is almost as strange as Suckling's. Davenant, if not one of the greatest, was one of the most thorough men of letters of his time. He belonged to the older race, not merely by his perhaps mythical relation to Shakespeare, but by his certain association with Fulke Greville and others; to the middle by his friendship with Hobbes and all the wits of the First Caroline period and the interregnum, as well as by nearly forty years' practice in letters and the theatre; to the newer age by his friendship and partnership with Dryden, and the powerful assistance which he gave to the return to rhyme on the stage. He was not only more of a poet than is sometimes thought, but a good deal of a critic; he could write correct and stately verse enough in *Gondibert*; and one or two of his lyrics—the early lines on Shakespeare, the famous "Lark" song, and others—could no more have been written by a man without an ear than Suckling's could, though they may not have quite the same airy grace. Yet Sir John himself is not a greater sinner than Sir William in respect of chaotic and barbarous blank verse. The third line of his first play, *Albovine*, which dates as early as 1629, runs—

Verona which, with the morning's dim eye—

an almost Occlevian abomination in its shapeless decasyllabicity, without corresponding rhythm. Suppose, charitably, that there is something wrong here—there certainly is, but not in this sense—and turn the page to

get a whole speech of some length in verse, that of Hermenegild to Paradine—

Rhodolinda doth become her title  
And her birth. Since deprived of popular  
Homage, she hath been queen over her great self.  
In this captivity ne'er passionate  
But when she hears me name the king, and then  
Her passions not of anger taste but love :  
Love of her conqueror ; he that in fierce  
Battle (when the cannon's sulphurous breath  
Clouded the day) her noble father slew.

Now I venture to say that this is immedicable. To the sanguine and complaisant ear some scraps of rhythmical promise, "Her title and her birth," "She hath been queen," and similar rearrangements, may suggest themselves. But it will be found that nothing of the kind "will *do*": it only leaves nubbles of shapeless and concordless phrase wedged between the experiments. Of course, if you slash with a Benteian hook, and simply throw the slashings away, you can do something with it ; but that is not the way *we* behave round this mulberry bush. Even the last resource of throwing the whole into prose—a thing which doubtless at this time may be done in some cases with advantage and perhaps justice—will leave it in no better condition. For then it will be the scraps of rhythm that intrude themselves awkwardly ; and moreover, the order of the words is not prose order. It simply has to be taken for what it is—blank verse, but hopelessly bad blank verse—knock-kneed, mutilated, awkwardly sliced at line-ends, with no pause-composition ; as inartistic as anything can possibly be.

Battle (when the cannon's sulphurous breath

is about as vile a thing metrically as I remember ; and if anybody says that you can put it all right by reading "battalia" or some similar form, I can only once more reply that, no doubt, if things were different they would not be the same, and that if Venus Anadyomene is allowed to be substituted for Venus Hottentotiana there will doubtless be an improvement in colour, outline, and

the rest. Moreover, it *is* the same everywhere, both in this play and in others. You may think, now and then, that you have got out of the stones of stumbling and on to fairly level ground ; but you will assuredly find yourself sprawling headlong, before a score or so of lines have been read. Even when some sort of rhythm is kept it is only by aid of reckless splitting of adjective from subjective, preposition from case, noun from verb, without the faintest excuse or atonement of special poetic or rhetorical effect. It is bad blank verse—and there's an end of it.

The problem. Now what does this mean? How could a man who could write the "Ballad on a Wedding," or "'Tis now since I sat down before," sit down, either before or after, to write such stuff as this, believing it to be any kind of tolerable verse whatever? How could an equally or more hopeless thing be done by one who could accomplish the workmanlike, if not wonderful, quatrains of *Gondibert*, the decent couplets of the *Siege of Rhodes*, and divers lyric measures, without tripping? How, much more, could a man like Shirley, who was neither a mere dilettante like Suckling, nor of a generation that was actually and already breaking away from blank verse like Davenant, occasionally condescend to it? Why did Glaphthorne, small as may be his actual inspiration, fail to produce at least as respectable verse as men a little earlier, with no greater gifts than his, could turn out? And why in other writers do we see the same sort of "rot" spreading? The answer is, I think, twofold.

And its  
answer.

In the first place, the degradation, strange as it may seem, can be set down in part to that very imitation, that very "literary spirit," which has been noticed. It must be remembered that the growth and the failing of blank verse were not separated from each other by any considerable stationary period of orthodox and settled practice. They overlapped each other with a copious and complicated overlapping, and the pupils could, with the greatest ease, take the irregularities which their masters had permitted themselves on the way to per-

fection as steps on the way to perdition. Further, though I believe too much rather than too little stress has been laid on the long-suffering shoulders of the printer, it must be remembered that the printed editions of Shakespeare and the rest are not exactly things "to *lippen* to," to place implicit and unquestioning faith in. But, most of all, it must be remembered that the most perfect blank verse is (from certain points of view) a tissue of exceptions and irregularities, and that it requires but a very little blundering in the use of these to make it a complete failure.

And this brings us to the other fold of the answer—that there *was* a spirit of such blundering abroad, and that by its works we know it.

The overlapping mentioned above confuses the vision ; while perhaps if we endeavour to get the two sets of phenomena separately envisaged, there is a danger of regarding them *too* separately. But, on the whole, when we consider the total effect of the work reviewed in the last chapter on this special subject, and the total effect of that reviewed in this, two different spectacles do seem to outline themselves to the mind's eye. The one is of a house, or houses, in process of building—in various stages of the process, in fact. Here the walls are half-reared ; there the complete "carcass" is finished, and even perhaps roofed in, but the interior is in various stages of imperfection. Here you have only the joists of a floor ; there the frame of a staircase clinging to the walls ; or all this done, but no decoration, no paper or painting. On the other side we have a house or houses in the process of pulling down, and at some stages of that process not very distantly resembling stages in the other process of building up. But to the fairly acute and careful observer the two things are very different. The "fervency of the work" is constructive in the one case, destructive in the other. In the one the workman is making himself a *pou sto* for further advance ; in the other he is hacking away the brick-work under him, making the plaster fly, tumbling down the beams and

planking. There is not much doubt as to what the result will be in the respective conditions.

Further  
instances—  
Goff and  
Cokain.

As a contrast of the two styles I do not think it too freakish to take two writers, each of whom has been rather a by-word with literary historians than a familiar study with readers—one of whom, indeed, is still not easy to study. I refer to Thomas Goff, of *The Raging Turk*, and Sir Aston Cokain, of *The Obstinate Lady*. Goff was indeed an older man than Cokain by some sixteen or seventeen years; but the former's plays were being acted at Oxford (c. 1630) just at the time when the latter was at Cambridge; and we know from Cokain's too chary revelations about the older playwrights that he must have been theatre-bitten pretty early. Moreover, the date of the second (collected) edition of Goff<sup>1</sup> coincides very nearly with the appearance<sup>2</sup> of Cokain's work—the date of composition of which we do not know at all. There is very good ground for thinking that it preceded the shutting of the theatres. Anyhow, and giving full value to their difference of birth-date, they represent, all the more completely for that, the older and the younger generation of First Caroline playwrights. Now Goff, whose work is even in other respects rather better than it has sometimes been represented as being, is a most respectable if by no means a heaven-born blank-verse writer. He drops into couplet sometimes—one would expect him to do so—at the end of scenes and speeches, and sometimes elsewhere. Yet his blank verse, as blank verse, is orderly enough; you will not find a real "hobblor," certainly not due to the printer, at all frequently.

But with Sir Aston it is quite different. His plays vary a little in this respect. I think *Ovid* is rather more regular than *The Obstinate Lady* and *Trappolin*. But even in it, and much more in the others, the "rot"<sup>3</sup> appears. Most people know that uncomfortable affection

<sup>1</sup> 1656. This, of which is my copy, is not a common book, and the earlier separate editions (1631-33) of Goff are very rare indeed.

<sup>2</sup> 1658.

<sup>3</sup> This, let it be remembered, was a contemporary word applied almost exactly in the modern cricket sense.



of the muscles or sinews, or whatever it is, which makes a man Mr. Ready-to-Halt without notice, and without his in the least expecting it. This happens to Cokain constantly; he is never safe from it; and not seldom he simply "hirples."

Another comparison is fortuitously suggested by the presence of the plays in the same volume of Mr. Bullen's invaluable collection, but is in itself much more than fortuitous. The fine anonymous play of *Nero*<sup>1</sup> was published in 1624, or just at about the turning-point of blank verse. Henry Shirley's *Martyred Soldier* dates fourteen years later, in 1638, when blank verse was far down the hill. That the first piece was evidently by some one of greater talent than Shirley the lesser—perhaps even than Shirley the greater—does not affect the question. For certainly Suckling, for instance, had talent enough for a dozen Chettles or Haughtons; and yet Chettle and Haughton write very decent "blanks." But the *Nero* man, whoever he was, and whether he writes just at the time when his play appeared or earlier, writes with his verse-team perfectly in hand. Some of them may trot and some may canter—he evidently wrote late enough to allow himself a good deal of redundance, though not of the Fletcherian kind,—but the whole sweep well together in almost every instance—a few misprints and the like excepted. The example to be given below is a fair average one.<sup>2</sup> Just compare it with Belisarius'

*Nero and  
The Martyred  
Soldier.*

<sup>1</sup> This play was made accessible to a larger public than Mr. Bullen's subscribers in an omnibus volume of the useful "Mermaid" Series (London, 1888).

<sup>2</sup> To make it "average" I avoid the specially fine speech of Petronius known from Lamb.

*Nero.* Aye, now my Troy looks beauteous in her flames;  
The Tyrrhene seas are bright with Roman fires,  
Whilst the amazed mariner afar,  
Gazing on the unknown light, wonders what star  
Heaven hath begot to ease the aged moon.

(The rhyme is quite characteristic and possibly intentional.)

*Belis.* Methought one evening, sitting on a fragrant verge,  
Closely there ran a silver gliding stream:  
I passed the rivulet and came to a garden—  
A paradise, I should say, for less it could not be,  
Such sweetness the world contained not as I saw.

speech from the *Martyred Soldier* which has been put side by side. It is not the contrast of bad verse with good merely, or of a moderate verser with a better. We are in a different country—or, to go to the former metaphor, the horses break step, pull different ways, stumble, start back, do everything that they should not do. You cannot “touch up” such verse; it must be wholly taken to pieces and re-made.

A few examples from separate plays in Hazlitt’s “Dodsley” may also be given—it would be easy to multiply them by the hundred. Listen to the excellent Thomas *Rebellion*. Rawlins in his *Rebellion*, two years later than *The Martyred Soldier*, and two years before the closing of the theatres.<sup>1</sup> One thinks curiously of that fine speech of Greene’s heroine fifty years before—

Why thinks King Henry’s son that Margaret’s love  
Hangs in the uncertain balance of proud Time?

and then perhaps, one may think likewise of Baudelaire’s sonnets on *Le Lever* and *Le Coucher du Soleil Romantique* and transfer them to the sunrise and sunset of blank verse. If poor Philippa’s poet—she is, as one of the characters says, “a fiery girl,” and her speech is nowadays wholly contemptible—had just avoided those two hideous break-downs—

Bring all the rough tortures  
and

Practised Sicilian tyranny, my giant thoughts,  
the “uncertain balance of proud Time” would not have put her so far below Margaret. But his ears were stopped and his hand was careless.

<sup>1</sup> Canst thou, proud man, think that Philippa’s heart  
Is humbled with her fortunes? No, didst thou  
Bring all the rough tortures  
From the world’s childhood to this hour invented,  
And on my resolute body, proof against pain,  
Practised Sicilian tyranny, my giant thoughts  
Should like a cloud of wind-containing smoke  
Mingle with heaven;  
And not a look so base as to be pitied  
Shall give you cause of triumph.

Take yet another<sup>1</sup> from that curious play *Andromana*, *Andromana*. which, though not printed till 1660, is probably "before the flood"—if not much before. The speech of Plangus is a very "moral" of the hopeless stuff of which we are now speaking—of verse run prose, and prose run mad, or rather of something that is neither pedestrian verse nor bombasted prose, but a sort of gallimaufry of both, corresponding with an almost alarming exactitude to the rhyme-royal of two hundred years earlier, and making one inquire in an uneasy fashion whether similar things may not happen  $x$  hundred years later.

Readers who really take an interest in the subject might indeed do worse than take up, say, the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth volumes of Hazlitt's "Dodsley" and run over the pages, stopping whenever they see blank-verse passages in plays of the First Caroline time—Habington's *Queen of Arragon*, Mayne's *City Match*, May's *Old Couple*, Cartwright's *Ordinary*, Rutter's *Shepherd's Holiday*, Fisher's quaint *True Trojans*, Berkeley's *Lost Lady*. Almost without exception they will discover for themselves, as it would take pages on pages of citation here to discover to them, the unscrewing of blank verse in all its stages, and the fact that even men who can be perfectly well trusted with verse of other kinds, such as Habington and Cartwright, appear to have lost all real grip of *this* kind—though they may not be quite so extravagantly chaotic as some others. The degeneration takes various forms, and exhibits, as we have said, various stages. Now it is not much more than a slight exaggeration of Fletcherian redundancy; now this is extended to the ugly splittings of connected words so often noticed; now it passes into chaos proper—the medley of non-descript inharmonies. And then between *The Rebellion*

Divers Caroline  
plays compared with  
*Lust's*  
*Dominion*.

<sup>1</sup> 'Tis more impossible for me to leave thee  
Than for this carcass to quoit away its gravestone  
When it lies destitute of a soul to inform it.  
Mariners might with far greater ease  
Hear whole shoals of Sirens singing  
And not leap out to their destruction  
Than I forsake so dangerous a sweetness.

and *Andromana* themselves let such a reader find *Lust's Dominion*, printed at about the same time as the latter and twenty years after the former. The prosodic effect is like nothing on earth but the bucket of cold water that used to be employed in early and Spartan Turkish baths, destitute of modern frippery and luxury of equipment, at the University of Oxford æons ago. No matter whether this "Lascivious Queen" is Marlowe's or not—he has had worse things ascribed to him as his creatures, and she could hardly have a better creator. The point is the absolutely different structure of the verse—its vigour, majesty, "brace"—as against the slipshod, "slamacking," dissolute facility of the others.

## CHAPTER IV

### CAROLINE LYRIC, PINDARIC, AND STANZA

Special character of this lyric—And special influence of Jonson and Donne—Some general characteristics—Special metres—The Caroline C.M.—L.M. and *In Memoriam* quatrains—The pure or mixed trochaic measures—Herrick—Carew—Crashaw—George Herbert—Vaughan—Lord Herbert of Cherbury—Marvell—The general—Digression on “*Phyllida flouts me*” and foot-division—“Pindaric”—Its rise in Cowley and its nature—The inducements to it—*Furor poeticus*, etc.—Its intrinsic attractions—Its history—Cowley’s own practice—The decay of stanza—The quatrain.

THE first subject of the present chapter forms one of the most delightful bodies of matter to be met with in the course of our whole inquiry; and it appertains to that inquiry in a peculiarly important fashion. Yet it will not perhaps be necessary to treat it at a length greater than, if so great as, that which we have given to periods and products very much less interesting and less obviously capital. The reason of this is that its contents are, in a way, results, “finals,” “last fruits of much endeavour,” in their particular sphere, rather than examples of that process of exploration and experiment which takes foremost place in a genuine history. And it may be further remarked, in the manner of general preliminary, that, on the whole, varied as are the forms of this lyric, *mere* variety is not its chief feature, and that its greatest results are attained in one or two well-known and long-established arrangements. For mere variety, the earlier Elizabethan and the First Jacobean periods probably beat our present.

Special character of this lyric.

And special  
influence of  
Jonson and  
Donne.

Here, more than anywhere else, the triple influence which has for so long been a settled fact to all fairly intelligent and well-read students, but which is constantly being advertised as a new discovery—the influence of Spenser, Jonson, and Donne—is exerted. Here, indeed, it culminates. But here, as the peculiarities of the subject made necessary, the two younger poets worked more strongly than the eldest. We have, indeed, in our dealings above with Jonson and Donne themselves, outlined a good deal that might have been said here.

Some general  
characteristics.

Attention has been already directed to the very startling difference in Donne, and to the less startling but still existing difference in Jonson, between the almost invariable smoothness of their lyric and the not infrequent roughness of their other measures. A similar distinction will be found, varying not seldom in individuals, but constant on the whole, in the very large group which we have now to survey by representatives so far as its purely lyric constituents go. Whether music is here in any large part the beneficent agent or not does not matter; the fact of prosodic accomplishment remains. And the fact also remains that this prosodic accomplishment, remarkable as it is everywhere, tends, as has been said, to concentrate itself specially upon one or two forms—the common measure, the octosyllabic quatrain, and the catalectic iambic-trochaic dimeter, either in couplet form or in arrangements. The effects produced by these are positively miraculous during a space of fifty years at the outside—at the inside probably not much more than five-and-twenty. But in variety and curiosity of lyrical experiment, though certainly this is not wanting in the time of Herrick and his mates, the period yields to its predecessor, and still more to the great lyrical revival of the nineteenth century. And in one very remarkable respect it still hangs back. It has been too positively said that for real triple time—for measures not merely admitting the trisyllabic foot, but based on it—we may seek in vain or with little result here; and it has been too positively replied, on the other side, that this is a mistake. But if the

literal truth is rather with the last-named disputants, the real is rather with the first. There is a certain amount of anapæstic verse, especially in the ballad or popular division. But it is seldom resorted to by the best poets ; and when they do use it they seem to think it unnecessary to be careful, or necessary to be careless. It does not reach even the point of excellence which we shall find in the later or Second Caroline division, to be treated in the next Book ; and it never, or only in the rarest flashes, comes anywhere near the splendid bravura of "Young Lochinvar" or the ineffable poetic witchery of the great Chorus of *Atalanta in Calydon*.

The subject will still be best dealt with, for the most part, in our usual way by surveying the work of different poets in order, partly chronological, partly of importance. But there are some of the special developments of metre just noticed which must be specially handled ; and first of the first—that marvellous spiritualising of the "common measure"—the eight and six or broken fourteener.

We have seen it arising in Ben and in Donne. Never, perhaps, was there a case more illustrative of the maxim *reculer pour mieux sauter* ; for the common measure, and its matrix the fourteener, had been, as a rule, the dullest and woodenest of First Elizabethan forms. Nor had the pioneers of the great stage done much for it. But now the new wine fills the old bottle, not to bursting, but to a marvellous transformation of its limp and flaccid outline. Of the poets under the combined influence of Spenser (who himself never tried it except in the *Kalendar*, and the doggerel headings of the *Faerie Queene*), Jonson, and Donne, hardly one fails with it. There is scarcely an adventurer from Herrick to Sedley who is not at his best when he touches it. The exact mechanical devices of this sudden attainment of the sublime cannot, of course—they never can—be given with actual certainty. They appear to me, however, after long analysis of the best examples in all the Caroline poets, to be at any rate connected with a rather strict *separation* of rhythm, if not of sense, at the line-ends ; a very careful selection of

Special metres.  
The Caroline  
C.M.

strong and sonorous syllables for the "long" places ; and a rather unusual proportion of foot-ending coincident with word-ending, so that the beats of the wing which is achieving the "tower" are distinctly felt. But the examinations of Mercury will never fully reveal the secrets of Apollo.

L.M. and  
*In Memoriam*  
quatrains.

No very different processes seem to effect the parallel exaltation of the "long measure" or octosyllabic quatrain, which, in the one glorious example of Marvell, attains the very highest place and in many others a place not far below. It must, however, always seem strange that the *In Memoriam* variation, once reached by Jonson and copied by Herbert and Sandys, should not have been more widely cultivated. We have seen that Ben himself did not fail to strike, though not constantly or certainly, the true tone of it ; nor, as examples later will show, did his chief follower. But it was seldom tried by any one else. And yet its special quality—of meditative melancholy music—is easily adjustable to "metaphysical" thought. It should have allured poets, from Crashaw and Vaughan to Kynaston and Hall, as, according to Izaak Walton, the juice of yew-berries attracts fish. The way, in particular, in which the second line of the included couplet positively invites epexegetis—added comment or imagery on what has gone before—should have been a perfect godsend to them. But the time was not yet.

The pure or  
mixed trochaic  
measures.

The special gift of the iamb, in spring and soar, though not absolutely limited to these metres, is more particularly shown in them. But the raising of the trochee to a higher power, which also characterises the period, is very much more diffused. In one case it is the line or stave which has special virtue, in the other the foot itself. The English trochee is, in fact, rather an uncanny foot—in which saying I am not merely alluding to its latent tendency to play Jacob to the iamb's Esau. It is (let us remember our Anglo-Saxon) Lilith—older than Eve, in a manner—dethroned by her, but never quite forsaken ; "kittle" to deal with, but of magical and witching attractions when taken in a kind and coming mood. There had been a



good deal of practice with it in the strict Elizabethan times, mainly in the form of the catalectic octosyllable: we have pointed out the effectiveness of it in Shakespeare's lyric passages. It had, as has been also pointed out, been in the same way very largely practised in Jacobean time by Browne, Wither, and those about them, as well as by Fletcher, while Ben himself has done beautiful work with it. But it was reserved for the group of his "sons" and their schoolfellows to bring it to the highest perfection; and in particular it forms one of the favourite instruments of Herrick—so much so that at this point we may pass into our more usual method of handling, and take poet by poet, illustrating metres and forms more generally as the opportunity presents itself.

With Herrick, indeed, there is a particular and interesting difficulty which is not found quite to the same extent in any other poet. The relation between style and metre, or between prosody and phrase, is, of course, always intimate and almost inextricable. It is especially so at this particular time. But not even in Milton is it so difficult to adjust the nice calculation of less or more in these two respects as in this elder in birth, companion almost exactly in death, of whom we may be half-glad and half-sorry that we have not Milton's expressed opinion. We must try, however, to make the sifting.

In Herrick's very first lines,<sup>1</sup> as they meet us—the Herrick. Dedication to Prince Charles—we find something notably metrical—that he has hit on the device of the specially emphasised "you" to vary and "pedal" the line—a device which Dryden, not so many years afterwards, was to adopt. The fifth line of the second Hesperid—

*The poor and private cottages,*

is perhaps an example rather of phrase than of "numbers"

<sup>1</sup> If I venture to refer to my own edition in the *Aldine Poets* (2 vols., London, 1893) it is only because I there carried out what I have always desiderated in others—the numbering of the poems right through. Herrick's mote-like cloud of poemlets urgently demands this, though I daresay I made slips in it.

in its felicity ; but not so the second of the eighth, a famous thing—

In sober mornings do not thou rehearse  
The holy incantations of a verse,

where the lengthening out of the words “the” “holy” and “incantations” shows the master of harmony at once. When a man is avized of a trick like this, he will go far ; and before long he *has* gone far in the marvellous couplets to *Perilla*, which end—

Then shall my ghost not walk about, but keep  
Still in the cool and silent shades of sleep.

But one might fill a chapter—nay, a Book—with examples of Herrick’s metrical legerdemain on this system. We must, alas ! confine ourselves to specimens of it in different arrangements.

His Jonson combinations, such as No. 106, in couplets, decasyllable, and octosyllable, deserve no special notice. He is better in stanzas like that of the Southwell “*Epi-thalamie*,” and still more the justly famous “*Corinna Maying*.” And the more he shortens his individual line, the better, as a rule, he is ; for that unerring phrase of his saves him from the difficulty which most poets find in avoiding awkward inversions or compressions of diction in such circumstances. The wonderful “*To Violets*” (No. 205) is perhaps greatest in this, but there are many nearly as great. And in most varieties, as in the most famous of all, “*Gather ye rosebuds*,” we shall find that the trochee, either as principal or as substitute, plays a great, perhaps the greatest part, of the music. Nowhere, perhaps, does his fancy for it appear more strikingly than in the beautiful

Charm me to sleep ; and melt me so  
With thy delicious numbers—

the said numbers dwindling down to what some would call amphibrachs (“*My fever*,” “*’Mongst roses*,” “*For Heaven*”), but what I should call monosyllabic feet and trochees, or catalectic iambic monometers, which are the

same thing. You clearly want the double foot. "To Meadows," another of the famous things, is probably the greatest piece in pure sixes that we have. I do not think that Herrick meant "flowers" and "hours" in the first verse (the only "doubtfuls") to be dissyllables. More elaborate, but perhaps not greater prosodic art, is shown by two of its companions in the general knowledge, "Fair Daffodils" and the "Night-piece to Julia"; and it is interesting to see how, in both, the iambic and trochaic bases are "legerdemained" the one into the other. The equally masterly "Mad Maid's Song" has a sort of sub-species of general Caroline common measure to itself: the verses sob more; they float "on a broken wing," to quote a great parallel in matter. No. 535, "To Electra," is undoubtedly in triple time; but it is not one of the best, and it is very important to notice that even in this the trisyllabic feet are rather substituted than staple.

He does not require extremely elaborate measures. I think it may even be said that he does not specially shine in them. "The Wounded Heart" (No. 20) is quite sufficiently done, but would hardly be selected by any one as a diploma-piece; nor "His Answer to a Question" (No. 26). But turn to the continuous heptasyllables of "The Loss of his Mistresses" (No. 39) and note the difference. If ever there was an "O of Giotto" in the lighter prosody, it is

Only Herrick's left alone.

And he seldom tries this metre without succeeding in it perfectly. In the full iambic octosyllable (happy as he is) he is never quite so happy; but his serious decasyllabic couplets are quintessential. Anthea (see the one quoted above, and 55 and 74) seems to have had the best of them,<sup>1</sup> but they are all choicely good.

On the other hand, in that common measure which, as has been said, is the masterpiece and cynosure of the

<sup>1</sup> As she did in the common measure "Bid me to live," and other forms. I should like to have known Anthea.

time, he is less certainly happy, though at times "past all whooping." "The Rock of Rubies," which offended Hazlitt (and made him offend), has something too much of the hardness of its subject; and he can elsewhere be mechanical and even singsong in the measure. Yet "Bid me to live" itself is one of the unapproachable things—pure effluence of pure essence of prosody.

In "To his Valentine" (No. 94) we have another example of the "Phillida flouts me" problem (*v. inf.*). It may be—

Choose me | your Va|lentine,  
Next, let | us mar|ry.

It may be—

Choose me your | Valentine,  
Next let us | marry.

Both are beautiful. I am not going to dictate, but it is fair to say that undoubted trisyllabic feet are rare in Herrick, though they exist.

The two greatest things in *Noble Numbers*, "The White Island" and "The Litany," are also its two most remarkable prosodic experiments, though there are others. On the whole, what has been said of Herrick above remains true.

Carew. In the work of his chief brother in "the Tribe," Carew, while there is a good deal of similarity in prosodic atmosphere, and especially in the way in which diction and versification almost refuse to be distinguished, and quite refuse to be divorced from one another, there is one great prosodic difference. Carew avoids almost entirely the more eccentric and variegated metrical experiments. The prosodic contours of his pages are mostly level enough: there is hardly any zigzagging and vandyking. Simple couplets or quatrains, triplets, quintets, sixains, serve him; and if he takes up the fretwork saw in the song "A Beautiful Mistress," he tires of it soon, and relapses into regularity. But out of this regularity he gets the most marvellous effects. He has been accused of artifice, labour, sterility, monotony; one can only borrow the famous and almost contemporary wish, and

sigh for more people to be monotonous, artificial, laboured, and sterile in this fashion. The heroics of the opening piece are beautiful, but not exceedingly ; the octosyllabics of the next, "To A. L.," are among those things of prosody before which it were almost best to be silent—so impossible is it to analyse the secret of their charm, and yet so intense is the feeling of it. Only, one can discern part of the mystery in that sudden "tower" which the poets of this period have mastered, and which appears in all their greatest things. Here Carew proceeds for some fifty verses or so, not by any means in a maundering or wool-gathering, but in a pleasantly wandering, strolling, flower-picking fashion. And then there is the sudden explosion of passion—

O ! love me then, and *now* begin it !  
Let us not lose this present minute,

where at the end every vein of the verse swells, every nerve quivers.

I have had frequent occasions of noting the singular success of quintets when they *are* successful. I wish I had been at Norwich in time to give Sir Thomas Browne a hint to extend the *Garden of Cyrus* in this direction. And in Carew's

When thou, poor excommunicate,<sup>1</sup>

I could have pointed him to certainly not the least of those which follow *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* in various applications of this number.

He has his own variety of the common - measure triumph of the time in

I was foretold, your rebel sex,

where the *r* and the *s* will demonstrate what two bare letters can do in a line, and where the final couplet

<sup>1</sup> When thou, poor excommunicate  
From all the joys of love, shalt see  
The full reward, and glorious fate,  
Which my strong faith shall purchase me—  
Then curse thine own inconstancy.

caps the double quatrain mirifically.<sup>1</sup> I am not sure that the trochaic sextets of "Disdain Returned" are a great success; though the virtue of its sentiments has conciliated some admiration. But it is not the fault of the foot or of Carew's use of it; nothing anywhere in English can match the trochees of

Read in these roses the sad story,

at least in the mixed mode; for the iamb plays a pleasant *chassé-croisé* all through. The splendour of the enjambed decasyllables of "The Rapture" is well known; and though the poem may be shocking from some points of view, nothing shocks prosody but false quantities or halting rhythm. Fortunately there is the "Elegy on Donne" to show the same mastery of the same metre in a fashion harmless to the youngest and most inflammable of young persons, or nearly so. For I am not sure that there is not a *tarte à la crème* everywhere for those who hanker after such things.

And lastly (for we must not dwell too long on a single songster in even this chorus of singing birds), Carew's best known and most universally admired piece, "Ask me no more," though I cannot say that it appeals to me as strongly as do a dozen others, shows his prosodic power admirably in the rise and fall of each stanza. I think it is a little artificial, this regular *forte* of the question couplet in each stanza, and *piano* of the answer, but there is no doubt that the artifice is faultless of its kind.

Crashaw. The use of the word "tower" a little above will, it may be hoped, have suggested the name of Crashaw to more than one reader; and certainly there is no greater

<sup>1</sup> I was foretold, your rebel sex  
Nor love nor pity knew,  
And with what scorn you use to vex  
Poor hearts that humbly sue;  
Yet I believed to crown our pain,  
Could we the fortress win,  
The happy lover sure would gain  
A paradise within.  
I thought Love's plagues like dragons sate,  
Only to fright us at the gate.

example of that phenomenon in English prosody—I doubt whether there is so great a one in any other—than the famous invocation of St. Theresa, the “rocket”-like quality of which has long ago been recognised. But this remarkable poet has another prosodic “record,” in quite the opposite way, for his equally famous “Wishes.” Carew is never really playful; and though Herrick often appears to be so, it is very serious playfulness. Great as both are in their and our way, it is an artful, if not an actually artificial greatness. Crashaw appears to have been a thoroughly natural person; he could not, with his wits, have been guilty of the extravagances of “The Weeper” if he had not been. Compare him with Cowley, and you will feel the difference at once; while I am not sure that he has not in this respect the actual advantage over Suckling. His constant and very felicitous practice, sometimes in Latin and sometimes even in Greek verse, no doubt helped his English prosody.<sup>1</sup> But he has little prosodic mannerism, or rather he has it in so many kinds that it is difficult to isolate. “The Tear” is like Herrick. Sometimes he has those prosodic ambiguities or amphibia which have been noticed as specially interesting at this time. For instance, the beautiful fragment on the marks of Christ’s wounds<sup>2</sup> is no doubt in intention iambic. But a nineteenth-century Crashaw could hardly have prevented himself from moulding the lines—

Are in another sense,

and so on, as they are arranged in the note, though of

<sup>1</sup> And his octaves, from the Italian of Marino, are noteworthy.

<sup>2</sup> What|ever sto|ry of their | cruelty, |  
Or | nail, or thorn, | or spear have | writ in thee, |  
Are | in ano|ther sense  
Still | legible.  
Sweet | is the dif|ference :  
Once | I did spell |  
Ev|ery red let|ter  
A | wound of thine|—  
Now | (what is bet|ter)  
Bals|am for mine. |

(*Poems*, ed. Waller; Cambridge, 1904.)

As usual, dactylic or amphibrachic arrangement is also possible.

course with some alterations. Every line, it will be observed, but

A wound of thine

goes well so, and even that is not hopelessly refractory on principles of substitution.

George  
Herbert

In prosody, as in other things, Crashaw's special master, George Herbert, is difficult to write of critically, without giving the perhaps uncritical reader a wrong impression. Here, as elsewhere, he is rather good than delicious. I do not, as I have said or hinted before, think any the worse of him for arranging *Altars* and *Easter Wings* of verse. I am not with Mr. Addison on this point, and a poet is quite welcome, for me, to write Easter eggs of verse as well as wings—if he likes, and will make the shell and white and yolk poetical. But there is more of the mechanical in Herbert's prosody than is shown merely by the adoption of these mechanical forms; and it is only when the fire of his poetry burns hottest that inspiration takes the place of mechanism. Plain eights, or "long measure," suit him as well as anything—

I got me flowers to straw Thy way,  
I got me boughs off many a tree,  
But Thou wast up by break of day  
And brought'st Thy sweets along with thee—

which (it may strike the reader) would be better still if, like his brother, he had adopted the *In Memoriam* form, and put line 2 first.

His sonnets are sometimes very good, and so are many of his mixed modes, especially a quatrain of 8, 10, 10, 8. In fact, he is scarcely ever bad prosodically, any more than in other ways; but he has not the rarest touch of his fellow-disciples, Crashaw and Vaughan. While of Vaughan himself it may perhaps be said with some truth that the thought usually has the upper hand of the form with him—the malt is above the meal. If he wrote that wonderful anonymous piece that Mr. Bullen discovered in the Christ Church library, he showed more prosodic



fingering there than anywhere else. Usually in his finest and best known things, "The Retreat," "The Watch," etc., the prosody is fully *adequate*, which is saying a very great deal, but it does not attract attention to itself. Some people, of course, would say it should not; on which point I give no opinion.

Herbert's elder brother, though a very much worse poet than the author of the *Temple*, is more interesting prosodically, because of his adoption, from Jonson probably but not certainly, of the *In Memoriam* metre, and of his making rather more progress with it than Jonson had made or than Sandys did make. The explanation of his advance is simple—that he gave himself more practice in it, and that such practice, except in the hands of an almost impossible dullard, must necessarily bring out the peculiar qualities which are inherent in the measure. It is curious that his first example, "The Ditty," is not wholly of this metre, but, as it were, settles down to it after a first stanza where the last line is a fourteener, and a second which strikes out of the form altogether into one totally different. But from the third to the end the model is kept, and the fourth, despite a certain awkwardness of phrase, develops the peculiar bird-sweep, the circular rise and fall, very fairly—

Lord Herbert  
of Cherbury.

For whose affection once is shown,  
No longer can the world beguile;  
Who sees his penance all the while  
He holds a torch to make her known.

But the much longer "Ode" is uniform from the first, and contains some still better examples, with one Helot, a stanza with double rhyme in the first and fourth, which is instantly fatal.<sup>1</sup> Herbert also tries what we may call the lengthened *In Memoriam* (though in all probability

<sup>1</sup> While doubling joy unto each *other*  
All in so rare consent was shewn,  
No happiness that came alone  
Nor pleasure that was not *another*.

This, which will be found at p. 94 of Professor Churton Collins's edition (London, 1881), is a curious and excellent example, showing how *touchy* the ark of prosody is.

the true form was actually shortened from it) in decasyllables; but the subtle charm of the thing is hidden here. That he brought it out at all is the thing, and for so doing one may pardon him a good deal—sophist and coxcomb, Bobadil and something like traitor, as he was.

Still one cannot help wishing that it had been somebody else who had hit on the measure. For instance, who could have brought out its capabilities much better than Andrew Marvell? Marvell is a sort of *bridge* in prosody: we shall have to deal with his couplets in the next Book; but the lyrics belong wholly to this. For the (widely) Elizabethan power of “fingering”—of getting the utmost possible out of metres borrowed or invented—not the greatest poet in English or in literature is Marvell’s superior. In that favourite and, as we have seen, constantly-practised measure of the earlier time, the catalectic octosyllable, he does not much practise; but the full form is his, almost in perfection, in the “Bilbrough” and “Nun Appleton” poems of places, the incomparable “Bermudas,” the “Fawn” poem, the “Coy Mistress” with its well-known couplet<sup>1</sup>—one of those which strike a certain terror, so “passionately and irretrievably” does the sound meet the sense—and others. In the transcendent common measure of the period he has not given the most transcendent example; but in “long measure” he has given the best of all—a thing often referred to, to be given here, but above comment.<sup>2</sup> The “Horatian Ode” is a sort of compromise prosodically between English and classical metre, a kind of transnotation, a little artificial, perhaps, and non-natural, but how exquisite!<sup>3</sup> “The Coronet” is one of the finest symphonic

<sup>1</sup> And tear our pleasures with rough strife  
Thorough the iron gates of life.

<sup>2</sup> My love is of a birth as rare,  
As ’tis for object, strange and high—  
It was begotten of Despair  
Upon Impossibility.

Where observe that part of the secret is exactly the opposite to that of the common measure—the *overrunning* of the foot by the word-ending.

<sup>3</sup> I do not say much about this remarkable piece, triumph as it is prosodi-

things of the whole period since Spenser, in very long stanzas, almost of the Pindaric kind. If, once more, we find a Donne-like contrast in the perfect artistry of these and the roughness of his couplets, we shall not be very much surprised.

But warning has been given more than once that we The general. must not linger too long in this island of a harmless Alcina—the Caroline lyric. In the “cuttit and broken” verse which King James, in one of his Solomon-moments, had characterised as depending on the invention of the poet—though if he had been quite Solomonic he would have added, “when once the rhythm is implanted in the general ear”—these men can do almost anything. From the best known to the least, from Suckling and Lovelace to Kynaston and John Hall, they get prosodic effects which at other times far greater poets cannot get at all—do not even attempt to get, or, attempting, fail miserably. They may be mere reeds by the river; yet the great god Pan has touched them and shaped them, and the ineffable music follows. Only it is important for us to put in the reminder that it could not have followed but for the patient experiment of generations from Spenser, nay from Watt and Surrey onward—that Pan is doing no sudden miracle: that the reeds have been planted, and watered, and trained, and are no mere wildings.

So also it is impossible to go through the later song-books and the miscellanies of the time and point out beauties. But even in these there is one famous piece on which we may pause a little, as on an example.

“Phillida flouts me,”<sup>1</sup> indeed, is one of the most Digression on “Phillida flouts me” and foot-division. important texts in the whole range of our scriptures for showing, first, how differently it is possible to scan the same collocations, and, secondly and much more also,

cally, because of its slight artificiality. It requires some assistance with the voice. You *can* make it a little singsong, if you are profane enough. Very slow time is required to bring out its beauty. In fact, it is a chief instance of the “fingering” above mentioned.

<sup>1</sup> The date of this charming thing is very uncertain. It appeared in *Wit Restored* (1657), but it is probably much earlier, though whether earlier than other examples of the metre or not is a question probably unanswerable.

how great is the excellence of foot-division against a mere counting of syllables on the one hand, and of "stresses" on the other. It may possibly not have occurred to everybody—it was certainly many years after he was thoroughly acquainted with both poems that it occurred to one person—that the metre of "Phillida flouts me" is essentially the same on syllabic, and quite potentially the same on accentual principles, with that of Longfellow's "Skeleton in Armour." The disposition of the lines is indeed slightly different; but the lines themselves are the same—one of six syllables and one of five; and for half of each stanza the actual disposition is identical. Yet, putting the *tune* of "Phillida" out of the question, the prosodic movement is entirely different, and nothing but foot-division will exhibit the reason or system of that difference. Syllabically, there is no difference at all; accentually, both may be scanned almost at pleasure as "two-stress" or "three-stress" lines. Justifications of all these statements will be found below;<sup>1</sup> but one of the arrangements will utterly destroy the plaintive dropping "innocence" (in both senses) of "Phillida," and both will rob the "Skeleton" of its martial and stormy sweep. To get the former you must scan "Phillida" in the longer lines as a dactylic or a

<sup>1</sup> Oh! | what a | pain is | love,  
How | shall I | bear it?  
She | will in|constant | prove,  
I | greatly | fear it.

Please | her the | best I | may,  
She | looks a'nother | way,  
A|lack and | well-a-|day,  
Phil|lida | flouts me.

Or

Oh! what a | pain is | love, etc.

The second syllable being common—or rather depending much on the time given to the first—and so yielding a dactylic start throughout. I need hardly ask the reader to remember Drayton and Agincourt in this connection.

And | as to catch | the gale,  
Round | veered the flap|ping sail;  
Death | was the helms|man's hail,  
Death | without quar|ter!  
Mid|ships with i|ron keel  
Struck | we her ribs | of steel,  
Down | her black hulk | did reel  
Through | the black wa|ter!

On the other hand, pure iambic scansion, which the stress system invites (and which would make of the opening of *Phillida* a kind of decasyllable broken, with redundancy, into 6 and 5), utterly destroys both—

Oh̄ what̄ | a pain̄ | is love,

And̄ as̄ | tō catch̄ | thē gale.

trochaic with short monosyllabic foot appended ; and you must take as the shorter lines dactyl *plus* trochee, or two trochees separated by a short monosyllabic foot. To get the latter you must rely on the central anapæst, with an anacrusis of one strong monosyllable, and an iamb, or monosyllabic foot alternately on the other side. If Longfellow had carried out this principle in his hexameters, and let them fall into the same movement with four anapæsts in the middle instead of one, the namby-pambyness of *Evangeline* would not exist.

I think it may be not impertinent to lay a little further stress on the importance of this instance in the argument for foot-division. On the strict syllabic calculus there is, as has been shown, no difference in the metre of the two poems ; on the strict accent, stress, or beat system there need be none ; and there is none on a very sufficient construction of both. But when the requirement of *feet*—of the attachment of unstressed, unaccented, unbeaten “short” syllables to the stresses, accents, beats, or “long” syllables in certain schemes—is met, then the difference—the true difference, the difference corresponding to nature and effect—emerges. It is the same, but in much more striking measure or degree, as the difference between the two scansion of Coleridge’s pattern hexameter-elegiac and of *Boadicea*, referred to at vol. i. p. 8. And I must again urge that the syllabic system and the stress system have no means of terminology, no device of any other kind, for indicating the nature of this attachment. The evasive phrase of “rising” and “falling” is utterly inadequate. Our system and our terminology can do it without effort—and will do it as a matter of course. It is no doubt possible that there are some ears so constituted that they do not hear the feet in their actual composition ; but they must be passed by.<sup>1</sup>

It is possible that some readers may be surprised at “Pindaric.” not finding “Pindaric” verse estated in a chapter to itself ;

<sup>1</sup> In connection with “Phyllida,” I should like to refer students to Mr. Ker’s paper on the *Arte Mayor* (*v. sup.* i. p. 408 *note*), though I must postpone the application.

but such a chapter would suit awkwardly with strictly historical method, and would be more appropriate to that of kinds, which others use. So envisaged, it would have to begin with Spenser and end with Mr. Swinburne, which would not suit us. It is, however, at our present point and in our present chapter, of sufficient importance to demand a section of rather more than ordinary "self-containedness," though we shall not find it necessary here to deal with, or to illustrate from, any poet except Cowley. The degradations of the style in the later part of the seventeenth century belong to the next Book, together with its partial rescue at the hands of Dryden; the eighteenth-century exercises in it, and the attempts of Gray to raise them, to the last of this volume.

Its use in  
Cowley, and its  
nature.

Although the Pindaric movement is rightly and indissolubly associated with the name of Cowley, it would be a great mistake—an even greater one than is common in such cases—to regard him as its only begetter. That it should have specially commended itself to him is, indeed, no wonder. It suited that restless and enterprising, but rather facile, eclecticism which was partly displayed in the last chapter; and he probably thought that he might find in it something of a refuge from the see-saw between "metaphysicalism" and "prose and sense" which we notice in him so often. But he would not have drawn after him anything like the portion of the poetic (or at least versifying) host that he did draw, if it had appealed merely to his private idiosyncrasies. There were other and important inducements to it, which were public and general.

The induce-  
ments to it.  
*Furor poeticus*,  
etc.

In the first place, and affecting not merely England, but all Europe, there was that odd devotion to, or at least belief in, *furor poeticus*,<sup>1</sup> which was accepted by the latest sixteenth and all the seventeenth century as safety-valve or sauce for the equally accepted doctrines of poetic rule and reason. You were allowed to be mad; it was creditable for you to be mad; and under whose auspices could you be mad so respectably as under those of the

<sup>1</sup> I must refer to the numerous passages on this subject in my *History of Criticism*, vol. ii. (Edinburgh and London, 1902).

"Theban eagle"? But this consideration was not specially prosodic or specially English; there were others that were both. In the first place, we can trace all along the century, from Drayton to Bysshe, a certain growing weariness of the stanza, or at least of the chief recognised stanzas. Rhyme-royal was almost sure to die down for a time after its long and partly glorious history of nearly three hundred years. Its nearest rival, the octave, has always been something of an alien—a visitor welcome, but not exactly naturalised—in English. The very splendour and completeness of the success of the Spenserian seem to have daunted imitators: as we have seen, they took everything from Spenser except his stanza, and made clumsy alterations of that. The quatrain was to be tried almost simultaneously with the Pindaric—and to fail. In fact, it is quite clear that the age was losing its taste for stanzas of all kinds except in lyric of moderate size. On the other hand, fast as it was settling towards the couplet, it had not yet definitely made up its mind which of the two forms of this it would prefer: and Cowley at least was a man of prosodic brains and prosodic practice, both more than sufficient to tell him that the couplet's danger was monotony for the reader and cramp for the writer.

Now the irregular Pindaric stanzas and lines, lengthened or shortened at the pleasure and judgment of the poet, and both adjustable to a poem of almost any moderate length—that is to say, to any of the "occasional" subjects which were more and more appealing—might seem to be free from all objections, and to promise all sorts of commodities. No form of cramp, whether of those incidental to the couplet or of those incidental to the shorter but regular and identical stanza, seemed to threaten them. They invited, without exactly imposing, the favourite and fashionable metaphysical exaltation, digression, parenthesis. They suggested the variety and the sweetness of rhyme without tying the poet down to the necessity of giving it at absolutely regular intervals. Their harmony fell in with the musical tastes of the time; in fact, they

*Its intrinsic attractions.*

were in manner larger lyrics—lyrical “magnums.” As for patterns, not merely Pindar himself and the Greek choruses (troublesome strophic arrangement being prudently dropped), but the Italian canzone, Spenser’s own two great odes, and other things presented themselves. Nor, in fact, to any one of very moderate versifying faculty were special patterns in the least necessary. The general rhythm of English prosody having been by this time sufficiently established, only individual incapacity could go far wrong. A fifteenth-century Pindaric is a thing too awful to think of; though, in fact, not a few fifteenth-century rhyme-royal stanzas are like small Pindaric strophes written by a bad poet and stupid man. But there was no such danger in the seventeenth, except that the individual stupidity would, of course, have its way in this form or that.

Its history. That Cowley says nothing of all this (or practically nothing) in his actual Preface to his Pindaric Odes will surprise no sensible reader. From his words you might think that he began by translating two actual Odes of Pindar into something more or less resembling their original form in English, and then was tempted to extend the practice to original composition. Very likely this was the actual conscious historical genesis of the matter in his case. But the order of conscious thought and the order of actual evolution are pretty notoriously not identical; and, as I must again and again remind readers, there is perhaps no case in which they need have coincided less than in prosody. It is sufficient that Cowley *did* adopt these irregular semi-lyrical stanzas or paragraphs; that they almost immediately “made a school”; that they produced, during the last half of the seventeenth century and much of the eighteenth, some of the very worst verse (poetically, not always prosodically) to be found in the English language; but that, though again and again corrected into Greek form by poets who were also scholars, they have practically maintained themselves to the present day, and have shown themselves quite as able to provide a poet with wings to soar as they are to



provide a poetaster with weights to sink. In fact, interesting as some of the regularly strophic arrangements<sup>1</sup> are, it may be doubted whether English is not of the "rebel sex" in poetry, and does not take such things rather impatiently. At any rate, it is a very significant fact that Milton, a scholar if ever there was one, the possessor of an ear the infallibility of which was only limited by his nonconformist temper and his unconquerable tendency to experiment, a craftsman able to do almost anything he liked with "numbers," did not adopt strict correspondence of form in *Lycidas*, or even in *Samson Agonistes*.

As for Cowley himself, it is of course very easy to show that his Odes are "not" several things; and most particularly that they are not Pindaric or choric, being usually an uncertain number of irregular stanzas, corresponding to one another neither in number nor in position of line, and arranged on no system of rhyme-tally. But this, apart from the question of mere nomenclature (and even perhaps, to some extent, in respect of that), is a merely technical, not to say a merely pedantic, objection. Take them for what they are, not for what they are not, and it is impossible to deny them great capabilities, which, in their very form, Dryden was to develop admirably in the "Mrs. Anne Killigrew" especially, and which, whether as regulated by Gray and Collins or remodelled afresh by the poets of the nineteenth century, were to add vastly to the stores of English poetry. Here, as elsewhere, Cowley wants the anecdotic "that—!" As in the *Davideis*, he accumulates and agglomerates fine things, and things not fine at all—harmonies and cacophonies, curiosities and mere oddities, in the most pell-mell fashion. As in the Lyrics—and this is specially important and unfortunate—his irregular schematisation is merely hit or miss, it may "come off" or not come off, almost at the hazard of the dice. Yet it makes one think of some of its author's own words. It is a "large garden" to the

Cowley's own  
practice.

<sup>1</sup> They date, the reader may be reminded, back to Ben Jonson at least, and were attempted by Cowley. Congreve's essays in them are in front of us.

"small house" of the couplet, and it afforded an invaluable place of escape, and exercise, and contemplation of nature to those whom the couplet cramped and confined.

The decay of stanza.  
The quatrain.

We may conclude the chapter with a few further words on the curious phenomenon which was noticed above, which will be found glanced at in the only prosodic document of the period, and which is one of its most important historically—the growth of discontent with stanza. Of course, there are plenty of long poems of the time which use this—Kynaston's *Leoline and Sydanis*, More's and Joseph Beaumont's great philosophical treatises, numerous others. Nor is there much return, if any, to the disorder of the fifteenth-century rhyme-royal—a disorder which is practically reproducing itself in blank verse. The mere stanza forms, now that some general sense of rhythm was diffused, were sufficient to prevent that. But the longing for the "geminell," which discloses itself in those curious observations of Drayton's long before, almost inevitably brings distaste of the symphonic forms with it. If they end in a couplet, why not have the couplet alone? If they do not, why don't they? That seems to have been the unspoken drift of the thought of the time, indicating itself even in such an apparently contradictory symptom as the Pindaric: indicating itself directly in the contraction of the stave to a mere quatrain in the first place, as a preliminary to reduction to the lowest term short of blank verse. The principal example of this, Davenant's *Gondibert*, belongs in time to the present Book and chapter, but the discussion of the measure had best take place when we come to its greatest practitioner, Dryden. Davenant, whose curious reasons for choosing it are noted elsewhere, manages it with fair skill, but certainly does not evade or conquer its defects.

The chief of these is the peculiarly soporific effect—an effect, as we shall see, not fully evaded or conquered by Dryden himself—of the form when repeated uniformly or at great length. *Gondibert* might have been a prose heroic romance of some interest; as a verse one

(putting poetry out of the question) it is almost more difficult to *read* than its contemporary and rival *Pharonnida*, though Davenant tells his story clearly enough, and Chamberlayne with an almost total absence of clarity.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The experiments in new *short* stanzas, such as the excessively awkward 10, 8, 12 of Benlowes' *Theophila*, point the moral.

## CHAPTER V

### PROSODISTS

Barrenness of the compartment—Jonson a defaulter—Joshua Poole or “J. D.”

Barrenness of  
the compart-  
ment.

Jonson a  
defaulter.

THIS chapter will probably be the shortest of the volume, except the corresponding one in the next Book, yet it is not, nor is that, introduced merely for the sake of symmetry. That after the very considerable interest taken in many if not all questions relating to poetry during the Elizabethan period proper, there should be, during a period so closely united with it in poetical practice, an almost total disuse of poetic theorising, may seem odd. But there is no doubt that, as a matter of fact, the first half of the seventeenth century with us is exceptionally barren in all kinds of critical exercise, and most barren in prosody. Jonson, the principal exception in criticism generally, had intended to be an exception here also. At the beginning of his unfinished *English Grammar* he not only, as he was by tradition almost bound to do, glances at prosody, and makes a distinction between English and the classical languages in point of quantity, but promises something of a discussion “in the heel of the book.” That heel, however, played him or us a worse trick than did the heel of Achilles; for it never, so far as we know, came into being at all. One naturally regrets this; for a prosodic treatise from the man who not merely was a great master of the practice, but who thought Fraunce a fool for writing in quantity, and Donne worthy of hanging for not keeping accent, ought to have

had something worth reading in it. Yet, after all, it might have been disappointing.

There is, however, one exception<sup>1</sup> late in the period and itself rather enigmatic, but curiously "up to date" and therefore important. In the first half of the century there lived a certain Joshua Poole whose birth-date is unknown, but who was entered at Clare Hall, Cambridge, in 1632, and appears to have passed the final years of his life up to 1646, when he died, as master of a private school at Hadley near Barnet, which had been set up by, and in the house of, a certain Francis Atkinson. To this Francis Atkinson he dedicated a book called *The English Parnassus*, which, however, did not appear for ten years after his death.<sup>2</sup>

Ungracious as it may seem, it has to be said that this Joshua so far as he himself is concerned, leaves us <sup>Joshua Poole</sup> or "J. D." completely in the wilderness. His book (evidently suggested by those of Fabricius, Mazzone da Miglionico, and others on the Continent) is an English *gradus*, giving a dictionary of rhymes, another of epithets for leading words, and a third part containing no uninteresting, but to us no important, anthology of illustrative passages. It is, in fact, one of the (except indirectly) mischievous "Poetry-made-easies" with which we have nothing to do. But when it appeared, it appeared with a second Preface "being a Short Illustration of English Poesy," with which we have a great deal to do, and which has been rather strangely neglected. This Preface is signed "J. D.," and it will naturally be asked who this J. D. was. There is unfortunately not the faintest scrap of evidence on the subject. It is, of course, impossible

<sup>1</sup> We need hardly make one for Davenant, though he has one paragraph in his long Preface touching on his stanza—the decasyllabic quatrain. He thought it would be less tiresome to the reader than the couplet, and less to the singer or composer than the stanza. For he seems actually to have hoped that this long poem would be sung, as Hannay seems also to have done with his not quite so long and more lyrical but still exorbitant *Philomela*. The fact is curious. Nor need more than mention be given to the slight references of Wallis to the classical metre craze in his *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* (1653).

<sup>2</sup> The first edition (London, 1656, or 1657?) appears to be extremely rare. Of the second (1677) I have a copy.

not to think of John Dryden, who, like Poole, was a Cambridge man; who was five or six and twenty at the time; who had long before written the "Hastings" lines; who had just taken up, or was just going to take up, his residence in London; who was about to write his first characteristic poem on Oliver Cromwell; and who is traditionally, though not very trustworthily, asserted to have done more or less hack-work for the booksellers about this time. But, except the chronological and circumstantial one, there is no link between Dryden and J. D. whatsoever. The style is not in the least like his, and there is (with one very trifling exception to be noted presently) no connection, that I at least can discover, of reading, allusion, or opinion.

Still, J. D. is not to be neglected; he gives us, in fact, our only important and detailed document between Daniel and Bysshe. He flourishes a little to begin with, but at least endeavours to come to close quarters by adding to his statement that "harmony in prose [a faint remembrance of Dryden's "other harmony of prose" arises] consists in exact placing of the accent, and an accurate disposition of the words"; that "poesy consists, besides, in measure, proportion, and rhythm." He knows Sidney, Daniel, and Puttenham's book (though not as Puttenham's); and he even knows the examples of fifteenth-century poetry which Ashmole had just published in the *Theatrum Chemicum*. He has no delusions about "Spondey [*sic*] and dactyl," and quotes the person who sent Ben Jonson a copy of verses beginning thus—

Benjamin immortal, Johnson most highly renownèd—

which, by the way, is quite as good as most of its kind. And he notes (which is quite noteworthy) that "all kind of historical poesy was performed by most of the European languages in stanzas *till of late*." He describes other kinds from lyric to didactic, and then turns to symphony and cadence. He objects to rhymes of different accent ("nature" and "endure"); to long parentheses; to the contemporary enjambment (for which

he has no word, but which he illustrates), and, very strongly, to apostrophes and words "apostrophated"—an objection priceless to us; also to double rhymes, which he thinks "speak a certain flatness derogatory to the dignity of the Heroic"; to polysyllables; to rough rhythm (he quotes Sir Thomas Urquhart); to identical rhyme; to assonance and to gradus-epithets, wherein it may be thought that he galled the kibe of the defunct Joshua's heel somewhat. But here he stops, or merely goes on to give some details about Joshua himself.

I think a good deal more nobly of this than some have done—in fact, than anybody has done, so far as I am aware. It is not, of course, very *durchgehend*: it is (and I confess this is part of its interest to me) rather like an intelligent article on the book and subject, by somebody who was turned on for the purpose; and I daresay it was this. But it at least shows that the writer knew something, had thought something, and had observed something in regard to that subject; and of such things in these early days we have astonishingly little. He fixes on the great and crying evil of "apostrophation," which was to become all the more mischievous because it was to drop some of its warning deformities. He is aware of the other evil of excessive and slovenly enjambment. It is perhaps necessary to have read more verse of the time than most people have read to know that the danger of allowing mere assonance was much greater than is commonly thought,<sup>1</sup> and he protests against this. He was right about the danger of numerous double rhymes; and, again, it was a pressing danger of his time. He presents, in all these respects, a curious contrast by anticipation to the *a priori* prosodists of the eighteenth century with whom we shall have to deal towards the close of this volume, and who, when they take account of English poetry at all, too often seem to think that nothing but the existing practice of

<sup>1</sup> To take a single writer, and not a bad one, Shakerley Marmion in *Cupid and Psyche* rhymes "born" and "form," "ocean" and "swam," even "ascribed" and "denied."

it is to be taken into account, and give no intelligent consideration even to that. In short, while they were blind, he was at least one-eyed and saw with his one eye. Now we know in what kingdom the one-eyed man is king ; and, once more, for prosodic discussion, if not prosodic practice, this seventeenth century is a most remarkable *Royaume des aveugles*.